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Jowett, Benjamin, 1817-1893  
Theological essays of the  
late Benjamin Jowett





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# THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS

OF THE LATE  
BENJAMIN JOWETT

SELECTED, ARRANGED, AND EDITED BY  
LEWIS CAMPBELL

LONDON  
HENRY FROWDE

1906

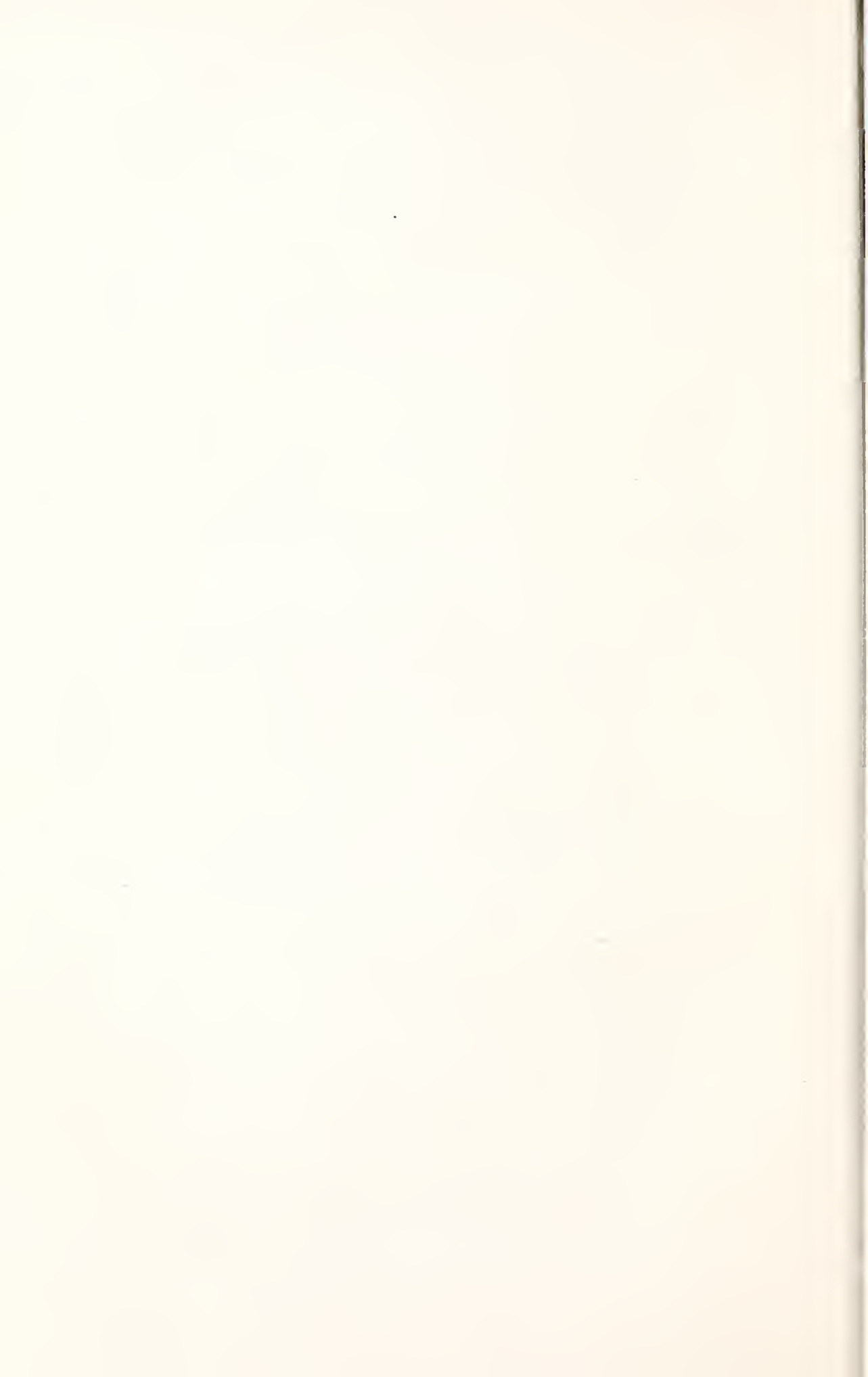
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TO  
HALLAM LORD TENNYSON  
THIS REPRINT  
OF ESSAYS BY HIS FATHER'S FRIEND  
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## INTRODUCTION

THE present Bishop of Oxford, to his lasting honour, preaching in Christ Church Cathedral, as Dean, in October 1893, exhorted his hearers to ‘praise God for the strenuous ungrudging energy, the hidden bountifulness, the true kind heart, the public spirit, the unworldliness, the deep reserve of strength, which were in Benjamin Jowett’<sup>1</sup>. The Regius Greek Professor of the years from 1855 to 1893 had triumphantly ‘lived down’<sup>2</sup> the obloquy which, from conscientious motives, had been commenced by a former Canon of Christ Church<sup>3</sup>, and promulgated by a former Bishop of Oxford<sup>4</sup>. His greatness as an educational and moral force could no longer be gainsaid; and his place in the literature of scholarship had been secured by his translations of Plato and Thucydides. But the injury to his reputation as a theologian was not thus repaired. The clergy of his own generation had been warned to avoid his teaching as ‘unsound’, and in the following years the younger men, whether theologically inclined or the reverse, were listening to other voices—sacerdotal,

<sup>1</sup> *Studies of the Christian Character*, by Francis Paget, D.D., 1895.

<sup>2</sup> See *Life of Benjamin Jowett*, I, 239.

<sup>3</sup> E. B. Pusey.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Wilberforce.

mystical, positivist, or aesthetic. The firstfruits of his ripe manhood were in danger of being buried in oblivion—the labour of his best years wasted. Yet there were not a few to whom his writings on religious subjects appeared invaluable; and there are some even to-day who are ready to endorse the words of A. P. Stanley in reviewing the work from which these essays are taken<sup>1</sup>: ‘The cynical and sceptical spirit of the time will have met with an antidote such as we shall vainly expect from any other quarter.’ Nor only the cynical spirit; but the neopagan hedonist temper, which saps the moral strength of many, meets here with a more searching humanism which penetrates to the inmost marrow of the mind and heart, and reaches that which is ‘far more deeply interfused’. What Wordsworth said ‘with invincible confidence’ of his own poetry<sup>2</sup> may be affirmed of Jowett’s theological writings. They ‘co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society wherever found, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier’.

Some part of what he expected from his own method in theology may be inferred from a passage towards the end of the essay on the interpretation of Scripture<sup>3</sup>:—

‘Is it a mere chimera that the different sections

<sup>1</sup> In the *Times* of Oct. 15, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lady Beaumont, 1807.

<sup>3</sup> *Essays and Reviews*, p. 423. Reprinted in 3rd edition of the *Epistles*, vol. ii, p. 91.



of Christendom may meet on the common ground of the New Testament, or that the individual may be urged by the vacancy and unprofitableness of old traditions to make the gospel his own—a life of Christ in the soul, instead of a theory of Christ which is in a book, or written down? Or that, in missions to the heathen, Scripture may become the expression of universal truths rather than of the tenets of particular men or churches? That would remove many obstacles to the reception of Christianity. Or that the study of Scripture may have a more important place in a liberal education than hitherto? Or that the ‘rational service’ of interpreting Scripture may dry up the crude and dreamy vapours of religious excitement? Or that, in preaching, new sources of spiritual health may flow from a more natural use of Scripture? Or that the lessons of Scripture may have a nearer way to the hearts of the poor when disengaged from theological formulas?’

That essay was contributed to a volume whose professed object was ‘to illustrate the advantage derivable to the cause of religious and moral truth, from a free handling in a becoming spirit of subjects peculiarly liable to suffer by the repetition of conventional language and from traditional methods of treatment’. In some such attempt as this Jowett saw the only hope of making Christianity a universal religion (see below, p. 220).

The essays which are here presented to the reader may be said to have had a threefold purpose:—(1) While interpreting St. Paul, to call up as far as might be, a true image of the Apostolical age;

(2) to apply the lessons of that age, and the teaching of the Apostle to actual life; and (3) to find such an expression for the theological doctrines which have been derived from that teaching, as may appeal to modern, or, if possible, to universal experience.

(1) The nature of the first endeavour may be best described in the words of Arthur Stanley, who, as Arnold's pupil, had the same problem in his eye. He says of Jowett in the article already quoted:—

‘He has approached the Apostolic writings with the view, not of imposing his meaning on them, but of learning their own meaning from themselves. He has placed himself not merely on the external scene, but in the living atmosphere of the Apostolic age. He . . . prepared himself for his work by committing to memory the whole of St. Paul's Epistles in the original Greek. But this is not enough . . . the immense layers of Papal, scholastic, and Puritan philosophy which intervene between ourselves and the Apostolic times; the elevation of the Apostolic point of view above the petty disputes in which we are absorbed; the very familiarity of the words of Scripture—all aggravate the difficulty of such an effort. . . . So to reproduce the past by the microscopic power of scholarship, and by the telescopic power of genius and learning, is the very purpose for which Universities are endowed, and for which Theology exists.’

(2) The second element or factor in Jowett's work belonged to the insight of a man of large experience and profound religious feeling, whose power of

sympathy was equal to the width and clearness of his mental vision. It is this which stamps a work of erudition with the character of genius. The growth of an intrinsic faculty, it was the fruit of his devotion to the educational work to which he had been called, and in which from the first he had been aware of possibilities that are hidden from less original minds. Whatever he had gained from his own early struggles with self, with temptation, or with circumstances, had been transfused into a means of helping others—of ‘strengthening his brethren’. Amongst his pupils had been men of genius, and his own experience was enlarged by theirs. These gifts, together with the rich and varied culture accumulated in student days, were now concentrated on what he had long regarded as his chief life-work. See, for example (below, p. 62):—

‘No one with a heart open to human feelings, loving not man less, but God more, sensitive to the happiness of this world, yet aiming at a higher—no man of such a nature ever made a great sacrifice, or performed a great act of self-denial, without impressing a change on his character which lasted to his latest breath. No man ever took his besetting sin, it may be lust, or pride, or the love of rank and position, and, as it were, cut it out by voluntarily placing himself where to gratify it was impossible, without sensibly receiving a new strength of character. In one day, almost in an hour, he may become an altered man; he may stand, as it were, on a different stage of moral and religious life; he may feel himself in new relations to an altered world.’



Or consider the following passage from an essay not included here:—

‘There is a state in which man is powerless to act, and is, nevertheless, clairvoyant to all the good and evil of his own nature. He places the good and evil principle before him, and is ever oscillating between them. He traces the labyrinth of conflicting principles in the world, and is yet further perplexed and entangled. He is sensitive to every breath of feeling, and incapable of the performance of any duty. Or take another example: It sometimes happens that the remembrance of past suffering, or the consciousness of sin, may so weigh a man down as fairly to paralyse his moral power. He is distracted between what he is and what he was; old habits and vices, and the new character which is being fashioned in him. Sometimes the balance seems to hang equal; he feels the earnest wish and desire to act rightly, but cannot hope to find pleasure and satisfaction in a good life; he desires heartily to repent, but can never think it possible that God should forgive. “It is I and it is not I, but sin that dwelleth in me.” “I have, and have never ceased to have, the wish for better things, even amid haunts of infamy and vice.” In such language, even now, though with less fervour than in “the first spiritual chaos of the affections” does the soul cry out to God—“Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”’<sup>1</sup>

In this and other adaptations of the Apostle’s thoughts the interpreter is guided by what he frequently calls ‘the analogy of faith’<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Epistles*, 3rd edition, vol. ii, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rom. xii. 6.

(3) The remaining purpose was one which made a more severe demand on strenuous thought and spiritual imagination. It was nothing short of the endeavour to give to the truths which 'darkly join' in Christian theology, and which the Church of the fourth century, or the reformed churches in the sixteenth, had formulated in a manner suited to that age, an expression which may appeal to the heart and intellect of modern times, and may not be found to clash with other truths, or with the highest standard of morality. It was through this attempt that Jowett gave offence to the religious world of his day by departing at once from 'Patristic' and from 'popular' theology.

Bishop Kaye, of Lincoln (1827-1853), had said that the decree of the Council of Nicaea 'was the greatest misfortune that ever befell the Church'. On this Jowett quietly remarks 'that is, perhaps, true; yet a different decision would have been a greater misfortune'. His method in this respect has much in common with that recommended by the late M. Auguste Sabatier in his sketch of a *Philosophy of Religion*. See, for example, the following passage:—

'Par ces discussions, par ces controverses mêmes auxquelles heureusement aucun pouvoir extérieur ne vient mettre fin, le dogme est sans cesse mis à l'épreuve, refondu en quelque sorte au feu de la forge; il perd sa dureté de loi extérieure; il reste chaud, malléable; il se dépouille des superstitions mortes du passé pour répondre aux besoins du présent, se diversifier naturellement avec les esprits,

s'ouvrir à la philosophie du siècle, la pénétrer à son tour, participer au progrès laborieux de la pensée moderne et rester toujours en harmonie et en communion avec elle <sup>1</sup>.'

In the present volume a certain progress may be traced from the first of these endeavours to the third,—the first two essays dealing more directly with the Apostolical age, while the third and fourth dwell more on religious experience generally, and the last three are mainly concerned with theology. The seven dissertations here reprinted are in this way representative of the whole work. It may be mentioned that the essay on the *Character of St. Paul* gave the motive for an ideal work of sculpture by Woolmer, and that on *Conversion* was pointed out at the time by H. J. S. Smith as likely to conciliate the Evangelical School. The essay on *Casuistry* should be compared with the account of Loyola in the volume of Biographical Sermons. Much else, of equal interest, might have been included, but would have extended the volume beyond the limits assigned to this series. Readers whose interest is awakened by what is here contained may be led to examine other portions of the original work,—such as the essay on *Predestination*, full of subtle disquisition, that on *The Law as the Strength of Sin*, where modern analogies are drawn out with deep observation, or that on *Contrasts of Prophecy*, or

<sup>1</sup> *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la Religion*, 7<sup>e</sup> édition, p. 332.



above all the essay on the *Interpretation of Scripture*, originally contributed to *Essays and Reviews*, and reprinted in the posthumous third edition of the *Epistles*. This last, comprising matter which the author had intended to include in his second edition, throws abundant light upon his general method and point of view. Minor excursions such as that on the *Belief in the Coming of Christ*, or on the *State of the Heathen World* (not reprinted in the 3rd edition), would also still repay perusal.

Professor Jowett was far from thinking that his work in theology was complete or final. Posterity, he said, 'will remark that up to a certain point we saw clearly; but that no man is beyond his age—there was a circle which we could not pass'<sup>1</sup>. Yet a disciple may be pardoned for believing that his writings may have even now an influence for good. The time for such endeavours is not yet past; and it is hoped that the present reprint may be received with 'better quiet, better opinion, better confirmation', than was accorded to these essays when they first appeared.

Many persons still require to be taught that 'the whole world, and all things in it, instead of being secular and external to revelation, needs to be brought back to within the sphere of revelation'<sup>2</sup>. And although in fifty years much water has passed the mill—though marvellous progress has been made

<sup>1</sup> 3rd edition of *Epistles*, vol. ii, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> See *Life of Benjamin Jowett*, vol. i, p. 372.

both in the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge,— yet the whole has not yet been harvested in the interest of religion. In ‘these slow-paced changes’ (the phrase is Dr. James Martineau’s) speculations, and even discoveries about human origins, or about the constitution of the material universe, do not add much appreciably to the long result of time. It may still be worth while, even for the most enlightened, to consider what a mind of exceptional fulness, of keen discernment and sincere piety, regarded as the main outcome of all that was known and felt half a century ago.

Students of Professor Jowett’s book on St. Paul may have much besides to learn, but they will not have much to unlearn. Historical studies have greatly advanced and so has Natural Science; but Gibbon and Humboldt are still worth reading. The very extent of the field makes concentration difficult. The success of special inquiries renders it harder for philosophy and for the religious mind to take all into one view. But, as Plato said, comprehensiveness belongs to the only kind of knowledge which takes lasting root.<sup>1</sup>

And religious thinking ebbs as well as flows. The past sometimes prevails over the present and dims the forecast of the future. There is a real danger lest Obscurantism should divide the ground which Religion and Science ought to occupy harmoniously together. The serene spirit which breathes through

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 537 c.



Jowett's writings may give courage to the timid and calmness to the bold.

The two large volumes published in 1855 (second edition, 1859) were after all only a fragment of the work which their author had in view. There are those amongst his friends who will always regret that the labours of the Oxford Vice-Chancellorship, and the exhaustion which followed, should have deprived him first of the leisure, and then of the mental vigour, that was requisite for the execution of his literary designs. He never lost his interest in theology; and the strong vein of reverent thoughtfulness, which pervades the book on St. Paul, was the same which carried him onward through many trials to the attainment of the Christian graces so eloquently commended by Bishop Paget.

Professor Jowett was less inclined indeed in later years to engage in controversy. He used to say, 'when we were younger, religious doctrines such as that of the Atonement were often presented in a form repugnant to the moral sense. That is not equally so now.' But it were much to be wished that he had written the treatise he so long contemplated on Moral Ideas, or had worked out his views on the Religions of the World; or had been able to substantiate the dream that was suggested to him by the *Imitatio Christi*:—

'Would it be possible to combine in a manual of piety religious fervour with perfect good sense and knowledge of the world? This has never been

attempted and would be a work worthy of a great religious genius. . . . Is it possible for me, perhaps ten years hence, to write a new Thomas à Kempis, going as deeply into the foundations of human life and yet not revolting the common sense of the nineteenth century, by his violent contrast between this world and another?'

Will Jowett some day have a successor—an inheritor of his unfulfilled renown—to sum up with calm insight, and with unclouded faith in God, the spiritual outcome of the last fifty years?—A Christian philosopher, gifted with knowledge of the world and human nature, yet not worldly; loving truth unflinchingly, and not despairing of it; accomplished, not only in theology, but in history and science, full of devotion to God and Christ, and also to the good of man?—Who knows?

LEWIS CAMPBELL.

ALASSIO, ITALY,

March, 1906.

# ESSAY ON THE CHARACTER OF ST. PAUL

Οἶδατε δὲ ὅτι δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν τὸ πρότερον,  
καὶ τὸν πειρασμὸν ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξε-  
πύσατε, ἀλλ' ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.—  
Gal. iv. 13, 14.

THE narrative of the Gospel gives no full or perfect likeness of the character of the Apostles. Human beings do not admit of being constructed out of a single feature, nor is imagination able to supply details which are really wanting. St. Peter and St. John, the two Apostles whose names are most prominent in the Gospels and early portion of the Acts, both seem to unite two extremes in the same person; the character of St. John combining gentleness with vehemence, almost with fierceness; while in St. Peter we trace rashness and timidity at once, the spirit of freedom at one period of his life, and of narrowness and exclusiveness at another. He is the first to confess, and the first to deny Christ. Himself the captain of the Apostles, and yet wanting in the qualities necessary to constitute a leader. Such extremes may easily meet in the same person; but we do not possess sufficient knowledge to say how they were really reconciled. Each of the twelve Apostles grew up to the fullness of the stature of the perfect man. Even those who to us are little more than names, had individual features as lively as our own contemporaries. But the mention of their sayings or acts on four or five occasions while they followed

the footsteps of the Lord on earth, and then on two or three occasions soon after He was taken from them, then once again at an interval of twelve or fourteen years, is not sufficient to enable us to judge of their whole character. We may distinguish Peter from John, or James from either; but we cannot set them up as a study to be compared with each other.

More features appear of the character of St. Paul, yet not sufficient to give a perfect picture. We should lose the individuality which we have, by seeking to idealize and generalize from some more common type of Christian life. It has not been unusual to describe St. Paul as a man of resolute will, of untiring energy, of logical mind, of classic taste. He has been contrasted with the twelve as the educated with the uneducated, the student of Hebrew and Greek learning, brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, with the fishermen of Galilee 'mending their nets' by the lake. Powers of government have been attributed to him such as were required, and in some instances possessed, by the great leaders of the Church in later ages. He is imagined to have spoken with an accuracy hardly to be found in the systems of philosophers. Not of such an one would the Apostle himself 'have gloried'; he would not have understood the praises of his commentators. It was not the wisdom of this world which he spoke, but 'the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery'. All his life long he felt himself to be one 'whose strength was perfected in weakness'; he was aware of the impression of feebleness which his own appearance and discourse made upon his converts; who was sometimes in weakness and fear and trembling before them, 'having the sentence of death in himself', and at other times 'in power and the Holy Ghost and in much assurance'; and so far



from having one unchanging purpose or insight, that though determined to know one thing only, 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified', yet in his manner of teaching he wavers between opposite views or precepts in successive verses. He is ever feeling, if haply he may find them, after the hearts of men. He is carried away by sympathy, at times even for his opponents. He is struggling to describe what is in process of revelation to him. 'Rude in speech but not in knowledge', as he himself says. The life of the Greek language had passed away, and it must have been a matter of effort for him to write in a foreign tongue, perhaps even to write at all; yet he puts together words in his own characteristic way which are full of meaning, though often scattered in confusion over the page. He occasionally lights also on the happiest expressions, stamping old phrases in a new mould, and bringing forth the new out of the treasury of the old. Such are some of the individual traits which he has left in his Epistles: they are traits far more interesting and more like himself than any general image of heroism, or knowledge, or power, or goodness. Whatever other impression he might have made upon us, could we have seen him face to face, there can be little doubt that he would have left the impression of what was remarkable and uncommon.

There are questions which it is interesting to suggest, even when they can never receive a perfect and satisfactory answer. One of these questions may be asked respecting St. Paul:—'What was the relation in which his former life stood to the great fact of his conversion?' He himself, in looking back upon the times in which he persecuted the Church of God, thought of them chiefly as an increasing evidence of the mercy of God, which was afterwards extended to

him. It seemed so strange to have been what he had been, and to be what he was. Nor does our own conception of him, in relation to his former self, commonly reach beyond this contrast of the old and new man; the persecutor and the preacher of the Gospel; the young man at whose feet the witnesses against Stephen laid down their clothes, and the same Paul disputing against the Grecians, full of visions and revelations of the Lord, on whom in later life came daily the care of all the Churches.

Yet we cannot but admit also the possibility, or rather the probable truth of another point of view. It is not unlikely that the struggle which he describes in the seventh chapter of the Romans is the picture of his own heart in the days when he 'verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus of Nazareth'; the impression of that earlier state, perhaps the image of the martyr Stephen (Acts xxii. 20), may have remained with him in after years. For men seem to carry about with them the elements of their former lives; the character or nature which they once were, the circumstance which became a part of them, is not wholly abolished or done away; it remains, 'even in the regenerate', as a sort of insoluble mass or incumbrance which prevents their freedom of action; in very few, or rather in none, can the old habit have perfect flexure to its new use. Everywhere, in the case of our acquaintance, who may have passed through great changes of opinion or conduct, we see from time to time the old nature which is underneath occasionally coming to the surface. Nor is it irreverent to attribute such remembrances of a former self even to inspired persons. If there were any among the contemporaries of St. Paul who had known him in youth and in age, they would have seen similarities which escape us

in the character of the Apostle at different periods of his life. The zealot against the Gospel might have seemed to them transfigured into the opponent of the law; they would have found something in common in the Pharisee of the Pharisees, and the man who had a vow on his last journey to Jerusalem; they would perhaps have observed arguments, or quotations, or modes of speech in his writings which had been familiar to them and him in the school of Gamaliel. And when they heard of his conversion, they might have remarked that to one of his temperament only could such an event have happened, and would have noted many superficial resemblances which showed him to be the same man, while the great inward change which had overspread the world was hid from their eyes.

The gifts of God to man have ever some reference to natural disposition. He who becomes the servant of God does not thereby cease to be himself. Often the transition is greater in appearance than in reality, from the suddenness of its manifestation. There is a kind of rebellion against self and nature and God, which, through the mercy of God to the soul, seems almost necessarily to lead to reaction. Persons have been worse than their fellow men in outward appearance, and yet there was within them the spirit of a child waiting to return home to their father's house. A change passes upon them which we may figure to ourselves, not only as the new man taking the place of the old, but as the inner man taking the place of the outer. So complex is human nature, that the very opposite to what we are has often an inexpressible power over us. Contrast is not only a law of association; it is also a principle of action. Many run from one extreme to another, from licentiousness to the ecstasy of religious feeling, from



religious feeling back to licentiousness, not without a 'fearful looking for of judgement'. If we could trace the hidden workings of good and evil, they would appear far less surprising and more natural than as they are seen by the outward eye. Our spiritual nature is without spring or chasm, but it has a certain play or freedom which leads very often to consequences the opposite of what we expect. It seems in some instances as if the same religious education had tended to contrary results; in one case to a devout life, in another to a reaction against it; sometimes to one form of faith, at other times to another. Many parents have wept to see the early religious training of their children draw them, by a kind of repulsion, to a communion or mode of opinion which is the extreme opposite of that in which they have been brought up. Let them have peace in the thought that it was not always in their power to fulfil the duty in which they seem to themselves to have failed. These latter reflections have but a remote bearing on the character of St. Paul; but they serve to make us think that all spiritual influences, however antagonistic they may appear, have more in common with each other than they have with the temper of the world; and that it is easier to pass from one form of faith to another than from leading the life of all men to either. There is more in common between those who anathematize each other than between either and the spirit of toleration which characterizes the ordinary dealings of man and man, or much more the spirit of Christ, for whom they are alike contending.

Perhaps we shall not be far wrong in concluding, that those who have undergone great religious changes have been of a fervid imaginative cast of mind; looking for more in this world than it was



capable of yielding; easily touched by the remembrance of the past, or inspired by some ideal of the future. When with this has been combined a zeal for the good of their fellow men, they have become the heralds and champions of the religious movements of the world. The change has begun within, but has overflowed without them. 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren' is the order of nature and of grace. In secret they brood over their own state; weary and profitless their soul fainteth within them. The religion they profess is a religion not of life to them, but of death; they lose their interest in the world, and are cut off from the communion of their fellow creatures. While they are musing, the fire kindles, and at the last—'they speak with their tongue'. Then pours forth irrepressibly the pent-up stream—'unto all and upon all' their fellow men; the intense flame of inward enthusiasm warms and lights up the world. First they are the evidence to others; then, again, others are the evidence to them. All religious leaders cannot be reduced to a single type of character; yet in all, perhaps, two characteristics may be observed; the first, great self-reflection; the second, intense sympathy with other men. They are not the creatures of habit or of circumstances, leading a blind life, unconscious of what they are; their whole effort is to realize their inward nature, and to make it palpable and visible to their fellows. Unlike other men who are confined to the circle of themselves or of their family, their affections are never straitened; they embrace with their love all men who are like-minded with them, almost all men too who are unlike them, in the hope that they may become like.

Such men have generally appeared at favourable conjunctures of circumstances, when the old was

about to vanish away, and the new to appear. The world has yearned towards them, and they towards the world. They have uttered what all men were feeling; they have interpreted the age to itself. But for the concurrence of circumstances, they might have been stranded on the solitary shore, they might have died without a follower or convert. But when the world has needed them, and God has intended them for the world, they are endued with power from on high; they use all other men as their instruments, uniting them to themselves.

Often such men have been brought up in the faith which they afterwards oppose, and a part of their power has consisted in their acquaintance with the enemy. They see other men, like themselves formerly, wandering out of the way in the idol's temple, amid a burdensome ceremonial, with prayers and sacrifices unable to free the soul. They lead them by the way themselves came to the home of Christ. Sometimes they represent the new as the truth of the old; at other times as contrasted with it, as life and death, as good and evil, as Christ and anti-Christ. They relax the force of habit, they melt the pride and fanaticism of the soul. They suggest to others their own doubts, they inspire them with their own hopes, they supply their own motives, they draw men to them with cords of sympathy and bonds of love; they themselves seem a sufficient stay to support the world. Such was Luther at the Reformation; such, in a higher sense, was the Apostle St. Paul.

There have been heroes in the world, and there have been prophets in the world. The first may be divided into two classes; either they have been men of strong will and character, or of great power and range of intellect; in a few instances, combining both. They have been the natural leaders of mankind, com-

elling others by their acknowledged superiority as rulers and generals; or in the paths of science and philosophy, drawing the world after them by a yet more inevitable necessity. The prophet belongs to another order of beings: he does not master his thoughts; they carry him away. He does not see clearly into the laws of this world or the affairs of this world, but has a light beyond, which reveals them partially in their relation to another. Often he seems to be at once both the weakest and the strongest of men; the first to yield to his own impulses, the mightiest to arouse them in others. Calmness, or reason, or philosophy are not the words which describe the appeals which he makes to the hearts of men. He sways them to and fro rather than governs or controls them. He is a poet, and more than a poet, the inspired teacher of mankind; but the intellectual gifts which he possesses are independent of knowledge, or learning, or capacity; what they are much more akin to is the fire and subtlety of genius. He, too, for a time, has ruled kingdoms and even led armies; 'an Apostle, not of man, nor by men'; acting, not by authority or commission of any prince, but by an immediate inspiration from on high, communicating itself to the hearts of men.

Saul of Tarsus is called an Apostle rather than a prophet, because Hebrew prophecy belongs to an age of the world before Christianity. Now that in the Gospel that which is perfect is come, that which is in part is done away. Yet, in a secondary sense, the Apostle St. Paul is also 'among the prophets'. He, too, has 'visions and revelations of the Lord', though he has not written them down 'for our instruction', in which he would fain glory because they are not his own. Even to the outward eye he has the signs of a prophet. There is in him the same



emotion, the same sympathy, the same 'strength made perfect in weakness', the same absence of human knowledge, the same subtlety in the use of language, the same singleness in the delivery of his message. He speaks more as a man, and less immediately under the impulse of the Spirit of God; more to individuals, and less to the nation at large; he is less of a poet, and more of a teacher or preacher. But these differences do not interfere with the general resemblance. Like Isaiah, he bids us look to 'the man of sorrows'; like Ezekiel, he arouses men to a truer sense of the ways of God in his dealings with them; like Jeremiah, he mourns over his countrymen; like all the prophets who have ever been, he is lifted above this world, and is 'in the Spirit at the day of the Lord'. (Rev. i. 10.)

Reflections of this kind are suggested by the absence of materials such as throw any light on the early life of St. Paul. All that we know of him before his conversion is summed up in two facts, 'that the witnesses laid down their clothes with a young man whose name was Saul', and that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the few Rabbinical teachers of Greek learning in the city of Jerusalem. We cannot venture to assign to him either the 'choleric' or the 'melancholic' temperament. [Tholuck.] We are unable to determine what were his natural gifts or capacities; or how far, as we often observe to be the case, the gifts which he had were called out by the mission on which he was sent, or the theatre on which he felt himself placed 'a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men'. Far more interesting is it to trace the simple feelings with which he himself regarded his former life. 'Last of all he was seen of me also, who am the least of the Apostles, that am not worthy to be called an Apostle, because

I persecuted the Church of God.' Yet there was a sense also [in which it is true] that he was excusable, and that this was the reason why the mercy of God. extended itself to him. 'Yet I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.' And in one passage he dwells on the fact, not only that he had been an Israelite, but more, that after the strictest sect of the Jews' religion he lived a Pharisee, as though that were an evidence to himself, and should be so to others, that no human power could have changed him; that he was no half Jew, who had never properly known what the law was, but one who had both known and strictly practised it.

We are apt to judge extraordinary men by our own standard; that is to say, we often suppose them to possess, in an extraordinary degree, those qualities which we are conscious of in ourselves or others. This is the easiest way of conceiving their characters, but not the truest. They differ in kind rather than in degree. Even to understand them truly seems to require a power analogous to their own. Their natures are more subtle, and yet more simple, than we readily imagine. No one can read the ninth chapter of the First, or the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, without feeling how different the Apostle St. Paul must have been from good men among ourselves. We marvel how such various traits of character come together in the same individual. He who was 'full of visions and revelations of the Lord', who spake with tongues more than they all, was not 'mad, but uttered the words of truth and soberness'. He who was the most enthusiastic of all men, was also the most prudent; the Apostle of freedom, and yet the most moderate. He who was the strongest and most enlightened of all men, was also (would he have himself

refrained from saying?) at times the weakest; on whom there came the care of all the Churches, yet seeming also to lose the power of acting in the absence of human sympathy.

Qualities so like and unlike are hard to reconcile; perhaps they have never been united in the same degree in any other human being. The contradiction in part arises not only from the Apostle being an extraordinary man, but from his being a man like ourselves in an extraordinary state. Creation was not to him that fixed order of things which it is to us; rather it was an atmosphere of evil just broken by the light beyond. To us the repose of the scene around contrasts with the turmoil of man's own spirit; to the Apostle peace was to be sought only from within, half hidden even from the inner man. There was a veil upon the heart itself which had to be removed. He himself seemed to fall asunder at times into two parts, the flesh and the spirit; and the world to be divided into two hemispheres, the one of the rulers of darkness, the other bright with that inward presence which should one day be revealed. In this twilight he lived. What to us is far off both in time and place, if such an expression may be allowed, to him was near and present, separated by a thin film from the world we see, ever ready to break forth and gather into itself the frame of nature. That sense of the invisible which to most men it is so difficult to impart, was like a second nature to St. Paul. He walked by faith, and not by sight; what was strange to him was the life he now led; which in his own often repeated language was death rather than life, the place of shadows and not of realities. The Greek philosophers spoke of a world of phenomena, of true being, of knowledge and opinion; and we know that what they meant by these distinctions is something



different from the tenets of any philosophical school of the present day. But not less different is what St. Paul meant by the life hidden with Christ and God, the communion of the Spirit, the possession of the mind of Christ; only that this was not a mere difference of speculation, but of practice also. Could any one say now—‘the life’ not that I live, but that ‘Christ liveth in me’? Such language with St. Paul is no mere phraseology, such as is repeated from habit in prayers, but the original consciousness of the Apostle respecting his own state. Self is banished from him, and has no more place in him, as he goes on his way to fulfil the work of Christ. No figure is too strong to express his humiliation in himself, or his exaltation in Christ.

Could we expect this to be otherwise when we think of the manner of his conversion? Could he have looked upon the world with the same eyes that we do, or heard its many voices with the same ears, who had been caught up into the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell? (2 Cor. xii. 1–5.) Must not his life have seemed to him a revelation, an inspiration, an ecstasy? Once and again he had seen the face of Christ, and heard Him speak from heaven. All that followed in the Apostle’s history was the continuation of that first wonder, a stream of light flowing from it, ‘planting eyes’ in his soul, transfiguring him ‘from glory to glory’, clothing him with the elect ‘in the exceeding glory’.

Yet this glory was not that of the princes of this world, ‘who come to nought’; it is another image which he gives us of himself;—not the figure on Mars’ hill, in the cartoons of Raphael, nor the orator with noble mien and eloquent gesture before Festus and Agrippa; but the image of one lowly and cast

down, whose 'bodily presence was weak, and speech contemptible'; of one who must have appeared to the rest of mankind like a visionary, pierced by the thorn in the flesh, 'waiting for the redemption of the body'. The saints of the middle ages are in many respects unlike St. Paul, and yet many of them bear a far closer resemblance to him than is to be found in Luther and the Reformers. The points of resemblance which we seem to see in them, are the same withdrawal from the things of earth, the same ecstasy, the same consciousness of the person of Christ. Who would describe Luther by the words 'crucified with Christ'? It is in another manner that the Reformer was called upon to war, with weapons earthly as well as spiritual, with a strong right hand and a mighty arm.

There have been those who, although deformed by nature, have worn the expression of a calm and heavenly beauty; in whom the flashing eye has attested the presence of thought in the poor withered and palsied frame. There have been others again, who have passed the greater part of their lives in extreme bodily suffering, who have, nevertheless, directed states or led armies, the keenness of whose intellect has not been dulled nor their natural force of mind abated. There have been those also on whose faces men have gazed 'as upon the face of an angel', while they pierced or stoned them. Of such an one, perhaps, the Apostle himself might have gloried; not of those whom men term great or noble. He who felt the whole creation groaning and travailing together until now was not like the Greek drinking in the life of nature at every pore. He who through Christ was 'crucified to the world, and the world to him', was not in harmony with nature, nor nature with him. The manly form, the erect step,



the fullness of life and beauty, could not have gone along with such a consciousness as this, any more than the taste for literature and art could have consisted with the thought, 'not many wise, not many learned, not many mighty'. Instead of these we have the visage marred more than the sons of men, 'the cross of Christ which was to the Greeks foolishness', the thorn in the flesh, the marks in the body of the Lord Jesus.

Often the Apostle St. Paul has been described as a person the furthest removed from enthusiasm; incapable of spiritual illusion; by his natural temperament averse to credulity or superstition. By such considerations as these a celebrated author confesses himself to have been converted to the belief in Christianity. And yet, if it is intended to reduce St. Paul to the type of what is termed 'good sense' in the present day, it must be admitted that the view which thus describes him is but partially true. Far nearer the truth is that other quaint notion of a modern writer, 'that St. Paul was the finest gentleman that ever lived'; for no man had nobler forms of courtesy, or a deeper regard for the feelings of others. But 'good sense' is a term not well adapted to express either the individual or the age and country in which he lived. He who wrought miracles, who had handkerchiefs carried to him from the sick, who spake with tongues more than they all, who lived amid visions and revelations of the Lord, who did not appeal to the Gospel as a thing long settled, but himself saw the process of revelation actually going on before his eyes, and communicated it to his fellow men, could never have been such an one as ourselves. Nor can we pretend to estimate whether, in the modern sense of the term, he was capable of weighing evidence, or how far he would have attempted to

sever between the workings of his own mind and the Spirit which was imparted to him.

What has given rise to this conception of the Apostle's character has been the circumstance, that with what the world terms mysticism and enthusiasm are united a singular prudence and moderation, and a perfect humanity, searching the feelings and knowing the hearts of all men. 'I became all things to all men that I might win some'; not only, we may believe, as a sort of accommodation, but as the expression of the natural compassion and love which he felt for them. There is no reason to suppose that the Apostle took any interest in the daily life of men, in the great events which were befalling the Roman Empire, or in the temporal fortunes of the Jewish people. But when they came before him as sinners, lying in darkness and the shadow of God's wrath, ignorant of the mystery that was being revealed before their eyes, then his love was quickened for them, then they seemed to him as his kindred and brethren; there was no sacrifice too great for him to make; he was willing to die with Christ, yea, even to be accursed from Him that he might 'save some of them'.

Mysticism, or enthusiasm, or intense benevolence and philanthropy, seem to us, as they commonly are, at variance with worldly prudence and moderation. But in the Apostle these different and contrasted qualities are mingled and harmonized. The mother watching over the life of her child, has all her faculties aroused and stimulated; she knows almost by instinct how to say or do the right thing at the right time; she regards his faults with mingled love and sorrow. So, in the Apostle, we seem to trace a sort of refinement or nicety of feeling, when he is dealing with the souls of men. All his know-

ledge of mankind shows itself for their sakes; and yet not that knowledge of mankind which comes from without, revealing itself by experience of men and manners, by taking a part in events, by the insensible course of years making us learn from what we have seen and suffered. There is another experience that comes from within, which begins with the knowledge of self, with the consciousness of our own weakness and infirmities; which is continued in love to others and in works of good to them; which grows by singleness and simplicity of heart. Love becomes the interpreter of how men think, and feel, and act; and supplies the place of, or passes into a worldly prudence wiser than, the prudence of this world. Such is the worldly prudence of St. Paul.

Once more; there is in the Apostle, not only prudence and knowledge of the human heart, but a kind of subtlety of moderation, which considers every conceivable case, and balances one with another; in the last resort giving no rule, but allowing all to be superseded by a more general principle. An instance of this subtle moderation is his determination, or rather omission to determine the question of meats and drinks, which he first regards as indifferent, secondly, as depending on men's own conscience, and this again as limited by the consciences of others, and lastly resolves all these finer precepts into the general principle, 'Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God'. The same qualification of one principle by another recurs again in his rules respecting marriage. First, 'do not marry unbelievers', and 'let not the wife depart from her husband'. But if you are married and the unbeliever is willing to remain, then the spirit of the second precept must prevail over the first. Only in an extreme case,



where both parties are willing to dissolve the tie, the first principle in turn may again supersede the second. It may be said in the one case, 'your children are holy'; in the other, 'What knowest thou, O wife, if thou shalt save thy husband?' In a similar spirit he withdraws his censure on the incestuous person, lest such an one, criminal as he was, should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. There is a religious aspect of either course of conduct, and either may be right under given circumstances. So the kingdoms of this world admit of being regarded almost as the kingdom of God, in reference to our duties towards their rulers; and yet touching the going to law before unbelievers, we are to think rather of that other kingdom in which we shall judge angels.

The Gospel, it has been often remarked, lays down principles rather than rules. The passages in the Epistles of St. Paul which seem to be exceptions to this statement, are exceptions in appearance rather than in reality. They are relative to the circumstances of those whom he is addressing. He who became 'all things to all men', would have been the last to insist on temporary regulations for his converts being made the rule of Christian life in all ages. His manner of Church government is so unlike a rule or law, that we can hardly imagine how the Apostle, if he could return to earth, would combine the freedom of the Gospel with the requirements of Christianity as an established institution. He is not a bishop administering a regular system, but a person dealing immediately with other persons out of the fullness of his own mind and nature. His writings are like spoken words, temporary, occasional, adapted to other men's thoughts and feelings, yet not without an eternal meaning. In sending his instructions to

the Churches he is ever with them, and seems to follow in his mind's eye their working and effect; whither his Epistles go he goes in thought, absent, in his own language, 'in the body, but present in spirit'. What he says to the Churches, he seems to make them say: what he directs them to do, they are to do in that common spirit in which they are united with him; if they live he lives; time and distance never snap the cord of sympathy. His government of them is a sort of communion with them; a receiving of their feelings and a pouring forth of his own: he is the heart or pulse which beats through the Christian world.

And with this communion of himself and his converts, this care of daily life, there mingles the vision of 'the great family in heaven and earth', 'the Church which is his body', in which the meaner reality is enfolded or wrapt up, 'sphered in a radiant cloud', even in its low estate. The language of the Epistles often exercises an illusion on our minds when thinking of the primitive Church; individuals perhaps there were who truly partook of that light with which the Apostle encircled them; there may have been those in the Churches of Corinth, or Ephesus, or Galatia, who were living on earth the life of heaven. But the ideal which fills the Apostle's mind has not, necessarily, a corresponding fact in the actual state of his converts. The beloved family of the Apostle, the Church of which such 'glorious things are told', is often in tumult and disorder. His love is constantly a source of pain to him: he watches over them 'with a godly jealousy', and finds them 'affecting others rather than himself'. They are always liable to be 'spoiled' by some vanity of philosophy, some remembrance of Judaism, which, like an epidemic, carries off whole Churches at once,

and seems to exercise a fatal power over them. He is a father harrowed and agonized in his feelings; he loves more and suffers more than other men; he will not think, he cannot help thinking, of the ingratitude and insolence of his children; he tries to believe, he is persuaded, that all is well; he denounces, he forgives; he defends himself, he is ashamed of defending himself; he is the herald of his own deeds when others neglect or injure him; he is ashamed of this too, and retires into himself, to be at peace with Christ and God. So we seem to read the course of the Apostle's thoughts in more than one passage of his writings, beginning with the heavenly ideal, and descending to the painful realities of actual life, especially at the close of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians—altogether, perhaps, the most characteristic picture of the Apostle's mind; and in the last words to the Galatians, 'Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'.

Great men (those, at least, who present to us the type of earthly greatness) are sometimes said to possess the power of command, but not the power of entering into the feelings of others. They have no fear of their fellows, they are not affected by their opinions or prejudices, but neither are they always capable of immediately impressing them, or of perceiving the impression which their words or actions make upon them. Often they live in a kind of solitude on which other men do not venture to intrude; putting forth their strength on particular occasions, careless or abstracted about the daily concerns of life. Such was not the greatness of the Apostle St. Paul; not only in the sense in which he says that 'he could do all things through Christ', but in a more earthly and human one, was it true,



that his strength was his weakness and his weakness his strength. His dependence on others was also the source of his influence over them. His natural character was the type of that communion of the Spirit which he preached; the meanness of appearance which he attributes to himself, the image of that contrast which the Gospel presents to human greatness. Glorifying and humiliation; life and death; a vision of angels strengthening him, the 'thorn in the flesh' rebuking him; the greatest tenderness, not without sternness; sorrows above measure, consolations above measure; are some of the contradictions which were reconciled in the same man. It is not a long life of ministerial success on which he is looking back a little before his death, where he says, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith'. These words are sadly illustrated by another verse of the same Epistle, 'This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me' (2 Tim. i. 15). So when the contrast was at its height, he passed away, rejoicing in persecution also, and 'filling up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake'. Many, if not most, of his followers had forsaken him, and there is no certain memorial of the manner of his death.

Let us look once more a little closer at that 'visage marred' in his Master's service, as it appeared about three years before on a well-known scene. A poor aged man, worn by some bodily or mental disorder, who had been often scourged, and bore on his face the traces of indignity and sorrow in every form—such an one, led out of prison between Roman soldiers, probably at times faltering in his utterance, the creature, as he seemed to spectators, of nervous sensibility; yearning, almost with a sort of fondness, to

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save the souls of those whom he saw around him,<sup>1</sup>—spoke a few eloquent words in the cause of Christian truth, at which kings were awed, telling the tale of his own conversion with such simple pathos, that after-ages have hardly heard the like.

Such is the image, not which Christian art has delighted to consecrate, but which the Apostle has left in his own writings of himself; an image of true wisdom, and nobleness, and affection, but of a wisdom unlike the wisdom of this world; of a nobleness which must not be transformed into that of the heroes of the world; an affection which seemed to be as strong and as individual towards all mankind, as other men are capable of feeling towards a single person.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 20; iv. 14; vi. 17: 1 Cor. xv. 32: 2 Cor. i. 9; vi. 12; x. 10; xi. 23-27; xii. 7-10: Philem. ver. 9.



## FROM AN ESSAY ON ST. PAUL AND THE TWELVE

EVENTS of the greatest importance in the annals of mankind are not always seen to be important, until the hour for preserving them is past. There is a time before biography passes into history, when a society has not yet learned to register its acts, and individuals have not awoke to the consciousness of national or ecclesiastical life. In this intermediate period, events the most fruitful in results may lie buried (the unfolding of the germ in the bosom of the earth is not the least part of the growth of the plant); they may also be reproduced in a new form and their spirit misunderstood by the imperfect knowledge of after ages. Two or three centuries elapse; documents are lost or tampered with, or confused; there is no eye of criticism to penetrate their meaning. The historian has 'the veil upon his face' of a later generation; he cannot see through the events, institutions, opinions in the circle of which he lives. Who can tell what went on in a 'large upper room' about the year 40? which may, nevertheless, have had great consequences for the world and the Church. Who, when Christianity was triumphant in the fourth century, would comprehend the simple ways and thoughts of believers in the first? Nor is there anything more likely to be misunderstood, than the differences between the first teachers of a religion, and the disputes of their respective followers about

a matter of discipline or doctrine which has passed away. The transition may be too gradual to be observed while it is going on. Literature is of a later date; beginning when the Church has already arrived at its full stature, it cannot describe the stages of its infancy and growth. In the extreme distance the objects of earth are no longer distinguishable from the clouds of heaven.

All history receives a colour from the age in which it is written. This is the case with ecclesiastical history even more than secular; it glows with the faith and feelings of the historian; it reflects his principles or convictions—it is sometimes embittered by his prejudices. Eusebius, ‘the father of ecclesiastical history’, believing as he did that the constitution of the Church which he saw around him had existed from the first, was not likely to give a consistent account of its origin or growth. Nor was it to be expected that he should trace the history of doctrines, who, within the Church at least, could have admitted of no doctrinal difference or development. It was impossible for him to describe that of which he had no conception. Had he been disposed to write an accurate account of the progress of the Christian faith in the first two centuries, the scantiness of his materials would have prevented him from doing so. The antiquarian spirit had awoke too late to recover the treasures of the past. Those who preceded him had a similar though less definite impression of the first age, of which they knew so little, and wrote in the same way. It would be an anachronism to expect that he should sift critically the few cases in which the earlier authorities witness against themselves. In point of judgement, he is about on a level with the other ‘Father of History’; that is to say, he is not wholly destitute of critical

power : yet his criticism is accidental and capricious ; most often observable in the case of ecclesiastical writings, which his literary tastes led him to explore. But real historical investigation is unknown to him. No resisting power of inquiry prevents his acceptance of any facts which fell in with the orthodox faith of his age, or seemed to afford a witness to it. Miracles are believed by him, not upon greater, but upon rather less evidence than ordinary events. He catches, like Herodotus, at any chance similarity, such as that between the first Christians and the Therapeutae of Egypt (ii. c. 17). He feels no difficulty in receiving the statement of Justin Martyr, that Simon Magus was honoured at Rome under the title of the Holy God (*Semo Sancus*) ; or the testimony of Tertullian, that the Emperor Tiberius referred the worship of Christ to the senate. He sees the whole history of the Church through the medium of that victory over Paganism and heresy which he had witnessed in his own day. He carries the struggle back into the previous centuries, in which he finds almost nothing else but the conflict of the truth with heresy, and the blood of martyrs the seed of the Church. No one can suppose that the heresiarchs were such as he describes them, or that he has truly seized the relation in which they stood to the primitive Church. The language in which he denounces them is a sufficient evidence that he could not have investigated with calmness the character of the ‘wolf of Pontus’, or the false prophet Montanus and his ‘reptile’ followers. Though living at a distance of a century and a half, he repeats and adopts the conventional abuse of their contemporary adversaries.

Records of the earliest heretics have passed away ; no one of them is fairly known to us from his own writings. Their names have become a byword



among men; at another tribunal we may believe that many judgements passed upon them have been reversed. The true history of the century which followed the withdrawal of the Apostles has also perished, or is preserved only in fragmentary statements. It is a matter of conjecture how the constitution of the Church arose; it is a parallel speculation, out of what simpler elements the earliest liturgies were compiled. But it does not follow that nothing happened in an age of which we know nothing. The least philosophy of history suggests the reflection that in the primitive Church there must have existed all the varieties of practice, belief, speculation, doctrine, which the different circumstances of the converts, and the different natures of men acting on those circumstances, would be likely to produce. The Church acquired unity in its progress through the world; it was more scattered and undisciplined at first than it afterwards became. Even the Apostles do not work together in the spirit of an order; they and their followers are not an army 'set under authority', of which the leaders say to one man 'come, and he cometh', and to another 'go, and he goeth'. The Church of the Apostles may be compared more truly to 'the wind blowing where it listeth', or even to 'the lightning shining from one part of the heaven to the other'. Paul and Barnabas and Apollos, and even Priscilla and Aquila, have their separate ways of acting; they walk in different paths; they do not attempt to control one another. Whatever caution is observable in their mode of dealing with each other's spheres of labour is a matter of courtesy, not of ecclesiastical discipline. It is not certain, perhaps on the whole improbable, that those who came from James to Antioch (Gal. ii. 12)



represented the community at Jerusalem. There is no Church which claims to be the metropolis of other Churches; nor any subordination within the several Churches to a single authority. The words of the Epistle to the Ephesians (iv. 11), 'He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers', are hardly reconcilable either with three orders of clergy, or with the distinction of clergy and laity. They describe a state of the Church in which there was less of system and more of impulse than at a later period; in which 'all the Lord's people were prophets', and natural or spiritual gifts became offices 'in the beginning of the Gospel'. Compare Rom. xii. 6; 1 Cor. xii. 28, 29.

Many doubts and possibilities arise in our minds respecting the age of the Apostles when we look on the picture 'through a microscope', and dwell on those points which are commonly unnoticed. We are tempted to frame theories and reconstructions, which are better, perhaps, represented by queries. Did those who remained behind in the Church regard the death of the martyr Stephen with the same feelings as those who were scattered abroad? or was he in their eyes only what James the Just appeared to be to the historian Josephus? Were the Apostles at Jerusalem one in heart with the brethren at Antioch? Were the teachers who came from Jerusalem to Antioch saying, 'Except ye be circumcised, ye cannot be saved', commissioned by the Twelve? Were the Twelve absolutely at one among themselves? Are the 'commendatory epistles' spoken of in the Epistle to the Corinthians, to be ascribed to the Apostles at Jerusalem? Can 'the grievous wolves', whose entrance into the Church of Ephesus the Apostle foresaw, be other than

the Judaizing teachers? Were 'the multitude' of believing Jews, who were all zealous for the law, and liable to be quickened in their zeal for it by the very sight of St. Paul, engaged in the tumult which follows? Lastly, how far does the narrative of the Acts convey the lively impression of contemporaries, how far the recollections of another generation? These questions cannot have detailed answers; to raise them, however, is not without use, for they make us regard the facts in many points of view; they afford a help in the prosecution of the main inquiry, 'What was the relation of St. Paul to the Twelve?'

If we conceive of the Apostles as exercising a strict and definite rule over the multitude of their converts, living heads of the Church as they might be termed, Peter or James of the circumcision and Paul of the uncircumcision, it would be natural to connect them with the acts of their followers. One would think that, in accordance with the spirit of the concordat, they should have 'delivered over to Satan' the opponents of St. Paul, rather than have lived in communion and company with them. To hold out the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas, and yet secretly to support or not to discountenance their enemies, would seem to be treachery to their common Master. Especially when we observe how strongly the Judaizers are characterized by St. Paul as 'the false brethren who came in unawares', 'the false Apostles transforming themselves into Apostles of Christ', 'grievous wolves entering in', and with what bitter personal weapons they assailed him (1 Cor. ix. 3-7). Indeed, the contrast between the vehemence with which St. Paul treats his Judaizing antagonists, and the gentleness or silence which he preserves towards the Apostles at Jerusalem, is a remarkable circumstance.

It may be questioned whether the whole difficulty does not arise from a false conception of the authority of the Apostles in the early Church. Although the first teachers of the word of Christ, they were not the rulers of the Catholic Church; they were not its bishops, but its prophets. The influence which they exercised was personal rather than official, derived doubtless from their 'having seen the Lord', and from their appointment by Him, yet confined also to a comparatively narrow sphere; it was exercised in places in which they were, but hardly extended to places where they were not. The Gospel grew up around them they could not tell how; and the spirit which their preaching first awakened passed out of their control. They seemed no longer to be the prime movers, but rather the spectators of the work of God, which went on before their eyes. The thousands of Jews that believed and were zealous for the law would not lay aside the garb of Judaism at the bidding of James or Peter; the false teachers of Corinth or of Ephesus would not have been less likely to gain followers, had they been excommunicated by the Twelve. The movement which, in twenty years from the death of Christ, had spread so widely over the earth, they did not seek to reduce to rule and compass. It was beyond their reach, extending to communities of the circumstances of which they were hardly informed, and in which, therefore, it was not to be expected that they should interfere between St. Paul and his opponents.

The Apostolic name acquired a sacredness in the second century which was unknown to it in the first. We must not attribute either to the persons or to the writings of the Apostles the authority with which after ages invested them. No Epistle of James and



Paul was received by those to whom it was sent, like the Scriptures of the Old Testament, as the Word of God. Nor are they quoted in the same manner with books of the Old Testament before the time of Irenaeus. We might have imagined that every Church would have preserved an unmistakable record of its lineage and descent from some one of the Twelve. But so far is this from being the case, that no connexion can be traced certainly, between the Gentile Churches of the second century and that of Jerusalem in the first. Jerusalem was not the metropolis of all Churches, but one among many; acknowledged, indeed, by the Gentile Christians with affection and gratitude, but not prescribing any rule, or exercising authority over them.

The moment we think of the Church, not as an ecclesiastical or political institution, but, as it was in the first age, a spiritual body, that is to say, a body partly moved by the Spirit of God, dependent also on the tempers and sympathies of men swayed to and fro by religious emotion, the perplexity solves itself, and the narrative of Scripture becomes truthful and natural. When the waves are high, we see but a little way over the ocean. The first fervour of religious feeling does not admit a uniform level of Church government. It is not a regular hierarchy, but 'some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, others pastors and teachers', who grow together 'into the body of Christ'. The description of the early Church in the Epistles everywhere implies a great freedom of individual action. Apollos and Barnabas are not under the guidance of Paul; those 'who were distinguished among the apostles before him', could hardly have owned his authority. No attempt is made to bring the different Churches under a common system. We cannot imagine any bond by which



they could have been linked together, without an order of clergy or form of Church government common to them all; this is not to be found in the New Testament. It was hard to keep the Church at Corinth at unity with itself; it would have been still harder to have brought it into union with other Churches.

Of this fluctuating state of the Church, which was not yet addicted to any one rule, we find another indication in the freedom, almost levity, with which professing Christians embraced 'traditions of men'. The attitude of the Church of Corinth towards the Apostle was not that of believers in a faith 'once delivered to the saints'. We know not whether Apollos was or was not a teacher of Alexandrian learning among its members, or what was the exact nature of 'the party of Christ', 1 Cor. i. 12. But that heathen as well as Jewish elements had found their way into the Corinthian community, is intimated by the 'false wisdom', and the sitting at meat in the idol's temple. It is a startling question which is addressed to a Christian Church: 'How say some among you that there is no resurrection?' (1 Cor. xv. 12). It is not less startling that there should have been fornication among them, such as was not even named among the Gentiles. In the Church at Colossae again something was suspected by the Apostle, probably half Jewish and half heathen in its character, which he designates by the singular expression of a 'voluntary humility and worshipping of angels'. And mention is made in the Roman Church of those who preached Christ of envy and strife, as well as those who preached Christ of peace and goodwill (Phil. i. 15).

Amid such fluctuation and unsettlement of opinions we can imagine Paul and Apollos, or Paul and Peter,

preaching side by side in the Church of Corinth or of Antioch, like Wesley and Whitfield in the last century, or Luther and Calvin at the Reformation, with a sincere reverence for each other, not abstaining from commenting on or condemning each other's doctrine or practice, and yet also forgetting their differences in their common zeal to save the souls of men. Personal regard is quite consistent with differences of religious belief; some of which, with good men, are a kind of form belonging only to their outer nature, most of which, as we hope, exist only on this side of the grave. We can imagine the followers of such men incapable of acting in their noble spirit, with a feebler sense of their high calling, and a stronger one of their points of disagreement; losing the principle for which they were alike contending in 'oppositions of knowledge', in prejudice and personality. And lastly, we may conceive the disciples of Wesley or of Whitfield (for of the Apostles themselves we forbear to move the question) reacting upon their masters and drawing them into the vicious circle of controversy, disuniting them in their lives, though incapable of making a separation between them.

A subject so wide is matter not for an essay but for a book; it is the history of the Church of the first two centuries. We must therefore narrow our field of vision as much as possible, and content ourselves with collecting a few general facts which have a bearing on our present inquiry.

First among these general facts, is the ignorance of the third and fourth centuries respecting the first, and earlier half of the second. We cannot err in supposing that those who could add nothing to what is recorded in the New Testament of the life of Christ and His Apostles, had no real knowledge of lesser matters, as, for example, the origin of Episcopacy.

They could not understand, they were incapable of preserving the memory of a state of the Church which was unlike their own. The contemporaries of the Apostles have nothing to tell of their lives and fortunes; the next generation is also silent; in the third generation the license of conjecture is already rife. No fact worth mentioning can be gathered from the writings of the Apostolical Fathers. Irenaeus, who lived about fifty years later, and within a century of St. Paul, has not added a single circumstance to what we gather from the New Testament; he has fallen into the well-known error of supposing that our Lord was fifty years old at the time of His ministry; he has stated also that 'Papias was John's hearer, and the associate of Polycarp', though Papias himself, in the preface to his discourses, by no means asserts that he was 'hearer and eyewitness of the holy Apostles' (Euseb. *H. E.* iii. 39); he has repeated as a discourse of Christ's the fable of Papias respecting the bunches of grapes; this he would have literally interpreted. Justin, who was somewhat earlier than Irenaeus, has given a measure of the knowledge and criticism of his own age in the story of Simon Magus. Tertullian, at the close of the next century, believed that the emperor Tiberius had consulted the Roman senate respecting the worship of our Lord (Euseb. *H. E.* ii. 2). Eusebius himself verified from the Archives of Edessa the fabulous correspondence of Abgarus and Jesus, and the miraculous narrative which follows (*H. E.* i. 13). In at least half the instances in which we are able to test his quotations from earlier writers, they exhibit some degree of inaccuracy or confusion. It is hard to believe the statement of Polycrates of Ephesus (about A. D. 180), that 'John, who rested on the bosom of the Lord, was a priest, and bore the sacerdotal plate' (Euseb.



*H. E.* iii. 32), or that Philip the Evangelist was one of the Twelve Apostles. But what use can be made of such sandy materials? It is idle to have recourse to remote reconcilements when the facts themselves are uncertain; equally so to argue precisely from turns of expression where language is rhetorical.

The second general fact is the unconsciousness of this ignorance, and the readiness with which the vacant space is filled up, and the Church of the second century assimilated to that of the third and fourth. History often conceals that which is discordant to preconceived notions; silently dropping some facts, exaggerating others, adding, where needed, new tone and colouring, until the disguise can no longer be detected. By some process of this kind the circumstance into which we are inquiring has been forgotten and reproduced. Nothing has survived relating to the great crisis which Christianity underwent in the age of the Apostles themselves; it passed away silently in the altered state of the Church and the world. Not only in the strange account of the dispute between the Apostles, given by Origen and others, is what may be termed the 'animus' of concealment discernible, but in fragments of earlier writings, in which the two Apostles appear side by side as co-founders of the Corinthian, as well as of the Roman Church (Caius and Dion. of Corinth, quoted by Euseb., ii. 25), pleading their cause together before Nero; dying on the same day, their graves being appealed to as witnesses to the tale, probably as early as the first half of the second century. The unconscious motive which gave birth to such fictions was, seemingly, the desire to throw a veil over that occasion on which they withstood one another to the face. And the truth indistinctly shines through this legend of the latter part of the second century, when



it is further recorded that St. Paul was at the head of the Gentile Church at Rome, Peter of the circumcision.

Bearing in mind these general considerations, which throw a degree of doubt on the early ecclesiastical tradition, and lead us to seek for indications out of the regular course of history, we have to consider, in reference to our present subject, the following statements:—

1. That Justin, who is recorded to have written against Marcion, refers to the Twelve in several passages, but nowhere in his genuine writings mentions St. Paul. And when speaking of the books read in the Christian assemblies, he names only the Gospels and the Prophets (*Apol.* i. 67).

2. That Marcion, who was nearly contemporary with Justin, is said to have appealed to the authority of St. Paul only.

(On the other hand, it is true that in numerous quotations from the Old Testament, Justin appears to follow St. Paul. It is difficult to account for this singular phenomenon.)

3. That in the account of James the Just, given by Josephus and Hegesippus (about A.D. 170), he is represented as a Jew among Jews; living, according to Hegesippus, the life of a Nazarite; praying in the Temple until his knees became hard as a camel's, and so entirely a Jew as to be unknown to the people for a Christian; a description which, though its features may be exaggerated, yet has the trace of a true resemblance to the part which we find him acting in the Epistle to the Galatians. It falls in, too, with the fact of his peaceable continuance as head of the Church at Jerusalem, in the Acts of the Apostles; and is not inconsistent with the spirit of the Epistle which bears his name. (*Comp.* Euseb. ii. 23.)

4. That the same Hegesippus regards the heresies

as arising out of schism in the Jewish Church. He was himself a Hebrew convert; and after stating that he travelled to Rome, whither he went by way of Corinth, and had familiar conversation with many bishops, he declares 'that in every succession and in every city the doctrine prevails according to what is declared by the law and the prophets and the Lord' (Euseb. iv. 22). This is not the language of a follower of St. Paul.

5. That in the Clementine Homilies, written about the year 160, though a work generally orthodox, St. Paul is covertly introduced under the name of Simon Magus, as the impersonation of Gnostic error, as the enemy who had pretended 'visions and revelations', and who 'withstood' and blamed Peter. No writer doubts the allusion in some of these passages to the Epistles of St. Paul. Assuming their connexion, we ask, What was the state of mind which led an orthodox Christian, who lived probably at Rome, about the middle of the second century, to affix such a character to St. Paul? and what was the motive which induced him to veil his meaning? What, too, could have been the state of the Church in which such a romance grew up? and how could the next generation have read it without perceiving its true aim? Doubtful as may be the precise answer to these questions, we cannot attribute this remarkable work to the wayward fancy of an individual; it is an indication of a real tendency of the first and second centuries, at a time when the flame was almost extinguished, but still slumbered in the mind of the writer of the Clementine Homilies. It is observable that at a later date, about the year 210-230, in the form which the work afterwards received under the title of 'the Clementine Recognitions', which have been preserved in a Latin translation, the objectionable passages have mostly vanished.

6. Lastly, that in later writings we find no trace of the mind of St. Paul. His influence seems to pass from the world. On such a basis 'as where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty', it might have been impossible to rear the fabric of a hierarchy. But the thought itself was not present to the next generation. The tide of ecclesiastical feeling set in another direction. It was not merely that after-writers fell short of St. Paul, or imperfectly interpreted him, but that they formed themselves on a different model. It was not only that the external constitution of the Church had received a definite form and shape, but that the inward perception of the nature of the Gospel was different. No writer of the latter half of the second century would have spoken as St. Paul has done of the law, of the sabbath, of justification by faith only, of the Spirit, of grace, of moderation in things indifferent, of forgiveness. An echo of a part of his teaching is heard in Augustine; with this exception, the voice of him who withstood Peter to the face at Antioch was silent in the Church until the Reformation. The spirit of the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians has revived in later times. But there is no trace that the writings of the Apostle left any lasting impress within the Church, or perhaps anywhere in the first ages.

Yet the principle of the Apostle triumphed, though at the time of its triumph it may seem to have lost the spirit and power of the Apostle. The struggle which commenced like Athanasius against the world, ended as the struggle of the world against the remnant of the Jewish race. Beginning within the confines of Judea, it spread in a widening circle among the Jewish proselytes, still wider and more faintly marked in the philojudaizing Gentile, fading in the distance as Christianity became a universal religion.



Two events had a great influence on its progress. First, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the flight to Pella of the Christian community; secondly, the revolt under Barchocab; both tending to separate, more and more, both in fact and the opinion of mankind, the Christian from the Jew.

It would be vain to carry our inquiry further, with the view of gleaning a few results respecting the first half of the second century. Remote probabilities and isolated facts are not worth balancing. The consciousness that we know little of the times which followed the Apostles is the best part of our knowledge. And many will deem it well for the purity of the Christian faith, that while Christ Himself is clearly seen by us—as a light, at the fountain of which a dead Church may receive life, and a living one renew its strength—the origin of ecclesiastical institutions has been hidden from our eyes. In the second and third centuries Christianity was extending its borders, fencing itself with creeds and liturgies, taking possession of the earth with its hierarchy. Whether this great organization was originally everywhere the same, whether it adopted the form chiefly of the Jewish worship and ministry or of the Roman magistracy, or at first of the one and afterwards of the other, cannot be certainly determined. A cloud hangs over the dawn of ecclesiastical history. By some course of events with which we are not acquainted, the Providence of God leading the way, and the thoughts of man following, the Jewish Synagogue became the Christian Church; the Passover was superseded by Easter; the Christian Sunday took the place of the Jewish Sabbath. While the Old Testament retained its authority over Gentile as well as Jewish Christians, the law was done away in Christ, and the Judaizer of the first century became the Ebionitish heretic of the second and third.



# ON CONVERSION AND CHANGES OF CHARACTER

## ROMANS VII

THUS have we the image of the lifelong struggle gathered up in a single instant. In describing it we pass beyond the consciousness of the individual into a world of abstractions; we loosen the thread by which the spiritual faculties are held together, and view as objects what can, strictly speaking, have no existence, except in relation to the subject. The divided members of the soul are ideal, the combat between them is ideal, so also is the victory. What is real that corresponds to this is not a momentary, but a continuous conflict, which we feel rather than know,—which has its different aspects of hope and fear, triumph and despair, the action and reaction of the Spirit of God in the depths of the human soul, awakening the sense of sin and conveying the assurance of forgiveness.

The language in which we describe this conflict is very different from that of the Apostle. Our circumstances are so changed that we are hardly able to view it in its simplest elements. Christianity is now the established religion of the civilized portion of mankind. In our own country it has become part of the law of the land; it speaks with authority, it is embodied in a Church, it is supported by almost universal opinion, and fortified by wealth and prescription. Those who know least of its spiritual life do not deny its great-

ness as a power in the world. Analogous to this relation in which it stands to our history and social state, is the relation in which it stands also to the minds of individuals. We are brought up in it, and unconsciously receive it as the habit of our thoughts and the condition of our life. It is without us, and we are within its circle; we do not become Christians, we are so from our birth. Even in those who suppose themselves to have passed through some sudden and violent change, and to have tasted once for all of the heavenly gift, the change is hardly ever in the form or substance of their belief, but in its quickening power; they feel not a new creed, but a new spirit within them. So that we might truly say of Christianity, that it is 'the daughter of time'; it hangs to the past, not only because the first century is the era of its birth, but because each successive century strengthens its form and adds to its external force, and entwines it with more numerous links in our social state. Not only may we say, that it is part and parcel of the law of the land, but part and parcel of the character of each one, which even the worst of men cannot wholly shake off.

But if with ourselves the influence of Christianity is almost always gradual and imperceptible, with the first believers it was almost always sudden. There was no interval which separated the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, from the baptism of the three thousand. The eunuch of Candace paused for a brief space on a journey, and was then baptized into the name of Christ, which a few hours previously he had not so much as heard. There was no period of probation like that which, a century or two later, was appropriated to the instruction of the Catechumens. It was an impulse, an inspiration passing from the lips of one to a chosen few, and communicated by

them to the ear and soul of listening multitudes. As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof; as the lightning shineth from the one end of the heaven to the other; so suddenly, fitfully, simultaneously, new thoughts come into their minds, not to one only, but to many, to whole cities almost at once. They were pricked with the sense of sin; they were melted with the love of Christ; their spiritual nature 'came again like the flesh of a little child'. And some, like St. Paul, became the very opposite of their former selves; from scoffers, believers; from persecutors, preachers; the thing that they were was so strange to them, that they could no longer look calmly on the earthly scene, which they hardly seemed to touch, which was already lighted up with the wrath and mercy of God. There were those among them who 'saw visions and dreamed dreams', who were 'caught up', like St. Paul, 'into the third heaven', or, like the twelve, 'spake with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance'. And sometimes, as in the Thessalonian Church, the ecstasy of conversion led to strange and wild opinions, such as the daily expectation of Christ's coming. The 'round world' itself began to reel before them, as they thought of the things that were shortly to come to pass.

But however sudden were the conversions of the earliest believers, however wonderful the circumstances which attended them, they were not for that reason the less lasting or sincere. Though many preached 'Christ of contention', though 'Demas forsook the Apostle', there were few who, having once taken up the cross, turned back from 'the love of this present world'. They might waver between Paul and Peter, between the circumcision and the uncircumcision; they might give ear to the strange and bewitching



heresies of the East; but there is no trace that many returned to 'those that were no gods', or put off Christ; the impression of the truth that they had received was everlasting on their minds. Even sins of fornication and uncleanness, which from the Apostle's frequent warnings against them we must suppose to have lingered, as a sort of remnant of heathenism in the early Church, did not wholly destroy their inward relation to God and Christ. Though 'their last state might be worse than the first', they could never return again to live the life of all men after having tasted 'the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come'.

Such was the nature of conversion among the early Christians, the new birth of which by spiritual descent we are ourselves the offspring. Is there anything in history like it? anything in our own lives which may help us to understand it? That which the Scripture describes from within, we are for a while going to look at from a different point of view, not with reference to the power of God, but to those secondary causes through which He works—the laws which experience shows that he himself imposes on the operations of his spirit. Such an inquiry is not a mere idle speculation; it is not far from the practical question, 'How we are to become better'. Imperfect as any attempt to analyse our spiritual life must ever be, the changes which we ourselves experience or observe in others, compared with those greater and more sudden changes which took place in the age of the Apostle, will throw light upon each other.

In the sudden conversions of the early Christians we observe three things which either tend to discredit, or do not accompany, the working of a similar power among ourselves.—First, that conversion was marked by ecstatic and unusual phenomena; secondly,



that, though sudden, it was permanent; thirdly, that it fell upon whole multitudes at once.

When we consider what is implied in such expressions as 'not many wise, not many learned' were called to the knowledge of the truth, we can scarcely avoid feeling that there must have been much in the early Church which would have been distasteful to us as men of education; much that must have worn the appearance of excitement and enthusiasm. Is the mean conventicle, looking almost like a private house, a better image of that first assembly of Christians which met in the 'large upper room', or the Catholic church arrayed in all the glories of Christian art? Neither of them is altogether like in spirit perhaps, but in externals the first. Is the dignified hierarchy that occupy the seats around the altar, more like the multitudes of first believers, or the lowly crowd that kneel upon the pavement? If we try to embody in the mind's eye the forms of the first teachers, and still more of their followers, we cannot help reading the true lesson, however great may be the illusions of poetry or of art. Not St. Paul standing on Mars' hill in the fulness of manly strength, as we have him in the cartoon of Raphael, is the true image; but such a one as he himself would glory in, whose bodily presence was weak and speech feeble, who had an infirmity in his flesh, and bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

And when we look at this picture, 'full in the face', however we might by nature be inclined to turn aside from it, or veil its details in general language, we cannot deny that many things that accompany the religion of the uneducated now, must then also have accompanied the Gospel preached to the poor. There must have been, humanly speaking, spiritual delusions where men lived so exclusively in

the spiritual world; there were scenes which we know took place such as St. Paul says would make the unbeliever think that they were mad. The best and holiest persons among the poor and ignorant are not entirely free from superstition, according to the notions of the educated; at best they are apt to speak of religion in a manner not quite suited to our taste; they sing with a loud and excited voice; they imagine themselves to receive Divine oracles, even about the humblest cares of life. Is not this, in externals at least, very like the appearance which the first disciples must have presented, who obeyed the Apostle's injunction, 'Is any sad? let him pray; is any merry? let him sing psalms'? Could our nerves have borne to witness the speaking with tongues, or the administration of Baptism, or the love feasts as they probably existed in the early Church?

This difference between the feelings and habits of the first Christians and ourselves, must be borne in mind in relation to the subject of conversion. For as sudden changes are more likely to be met with amongst the poor and uneducated in the present day, it certainly throws light on the subject of the first conversions, that to the poor and uneducated the Gospel was first preached. And yet these sudden changes were as real, nay, more real than any gradual changes which take place among ourselves. The Stoic or Epicurean philosopher who had come into an assembly of believers speaking with tongues, would have remarked, that among the vulgar religious extravagances were usually short-lived. But it was not so. There was more there than he had eyes to see, or than was dreamed of in a philosophy like his. Not only was there the superficial appearance of poverty and meanness and enthusiasm, from a nearer

view of which we are apt to shrink, but underneath this, brighter from its very obscurity, purer from the meanness of the raiment in which it was apparelled, was the life hidden with Christ and God. There, and there only, was the power which made a man humble instead of proud, self-denying instead of self-seeking, spiritual instead of carnal; which made him embrace, not only the brethren, but the whole human race in the arms of his love.

But it is a further difference between the power of the Gospel now and in the first ages, that it no longer converts whole multitudes at once. Perhaps this very individuality in its mode of working may not be without an advantage in awakening us to its higher truths and more entire spiritual freedom. Whether this be so or not; whether there be any spiritual law by which reason, in a measure, takes the place of faith, and the common religious impulse weakens as the power of reflection grows, we certainly observe a diminution in the collective force which religion exercises on the hearts of men. In our own days the preacher sees the seed which he has sown gradually spring up; first one, then another begins to lead a better life; then a change comes over the state of society, often from causes over which he has no control; he makes some steps forwards and a few backwards, and trusts far more, if he is wise, to the silent influence of religious education than to the power of preaching; and, perhaps, the result of a long life of ministerial labour is far less than that of a single discourse from the lips of the Apostles or their followers. Even in missions to the heathen the vital energies of Christianity cease to operate to any great extent, at least on the effete civilization of India and China; the limits of the kingdoms of light and darkness are nearly the same



as heretofore. At any rate it cannot be said that Christianity has wrought any sudden amelioration of mankind by the immediate preaching of the word, since the conversion of the barbarians. Even within the Christian world there is a parallel retardation. The ebb and flow of reformation and counter-reformation have hardly changed the permanent landmarks. The age of spiritual crises is past. The growth of Christianity in modern times may be compared to the change of the body, when it has already arrived at its full stature. In one half-century so vast a progress was made, in a few centuries more the world itself seemed to 'have gone after Him', and now for near a thousand years the voice of experience is repeating to us, 'Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further'.

Looking at this remarkable phenomenon of the conversion of whole multitudes at once, not from its Divine but from its human aspect (that is, with reference to that provision that God himself has made in human nature for the execution of his will), the first cause to which we are naturally led to attribute it is the power of sympathy. Why it is that men ever act together is a mystery of which our individual self-consciousness gives no account, any more than why we speak a common language, or form nations or societies, or merely in our physical nature are capable of taking diseases from one another. Nature and the Author of nature have made us thus dependent on each other both in body and soul. Whoever has seen human beings collected together in masses, and watched the movements that pass over them, like 'the trees of the forest moving in the wind', will have no difficulty in imagining, if not in understanding, how the same voice might have found its way at the same instant to a thousand



hearts, without our being able to say where the fire was first kindled, or by whom the inspiration was first caught. Such historical events as the Reformation, or the Crusades, or the French Revolution, are a sufficient evidence that a whole people, or almost, we may say, half a world, may be 'drunk into one spirit', springing up, as it might seem, spontaneously in the breast of each, yet common to all. A parallel yet nearer is furnished by the history of the Jewish people, in whose sudden rebellion and restoration to God's favour, we recognize literally the momentary workings of, what is to ourselves a figure of speech, a national conscience.

In ordinary cases we should truly say that there must have been some predisposing cause of a great political or religious revolution; some latent elements acting alike upon all, which, though long smouldering beneath, burst forth at last into a flame. Such a cause might be the misery of mankind, or the intense corruption of human society, which could not be quickened except it die, or the long-suppressed yearnings of the soul after something higher than it had hitherto known upon earth, or the reflected light of one religion or one movement of the human mind upon another. Such causes were actually at work, preparing the way for the diffusion of Christianity. The law itself was beginning to pass away in an altered world, the state of society was hollow, the chosen people were hopelessly under the Roman yoke. Good men refrained from the wild attempt of the Galilean Judas; yet the spirit which animated such attempts was slumbering in their bosoms. Looking back at their own past history, they could not but remember, even in an altered world, that there was One who ruled among the kingdoms of men, 'beside whom there was no God'. Were they

to suppose that His arm was straitened to save? that He had forgotten His tender mercies to the house of David? that the aspirations of the prophets were vain? that the blood of the Maccabean heroes had sunk like water into the earth? This was a hard saying; who could bear it? It was long ere the nation, like the individual, put off the old man—that is, the temporal dispensation—and put on the new man—that is, the spiritual Israel. The very misery of the people seemed to forbid them to acquiesce in their present state. And with the miserable condition of the nation sprang up also the feeling, not only in individuals but in the race, that for their sins they were chastened, the feeling which their whole history seemed to deepen and increase. At last the scales fell from their eyes; the veil that was on the face of Moses was first transfigured before them, then removed; the thoughts of many hearts turned simultaneously to the Hope of Israel, ‘Him whom the law and the prophets foretold’. As they listened to the preaching of the Apostles, they seemed to hear a truth both new and old; what many had thought, but none had uttered; which in its comfort and joyousness seemed to them new, and yet, from its familiarity and suitableness to their condition, not the less old.

Spiritual life, no less than natural life, is often the very opposite of the elements which seem to give birth to it. The preparation for the way of the Lord, which John the Baptist preached, did not consist in a direct reference to the Saviour. The words ‘He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire’, and ‘He shall burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable’, could have given the Jews no exact conception of Him who ‘did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax’. It was

in another way that John prepared for Christ, by quickening the moral sense of the people, and sounding in their ears the voice 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Beyond this useful lesson, there was a kind of vacancy in the preaching of John. He himself, as 'he was finishing his course', testified that his work was incomplete, and that he was not the Christ. The Jewish people were prepared by his preaching for the coming of Christ, just as an individual might be prepared to receive Him by the conviction of sin and the conscious need of forgiveness.

Except from the Gospel history and the writings of Josephus and Philo, we know but little of the tendencies of the Jewish mind in the time of our Lord. Yet we cannot doubt that the entrance of Christianity into the world was not sudden and abrupt; that is an allusion which arises in the mind from our slender acquaintance with contemporary opinions. Better and higher and holier as it was, it was not absolutely distinct from the teaching of the doctors of the law either in form or substance; it was not unconnected with, but gave life and truth to, the mystic fancies of Alexandrian philosophy. Even in the counsels of perfection of the Sermon on the Mount, there is probably nothing which might not be found, either in letter or spirit, in Philo or some other Jewish or Eastern writer. The peculiarity of the Gospel is, not that it teaches what is wholly new, but that it draws out of the treasure-house of the human heart things new and old, gathering together in one the dispersed fragments of the truth. The common people would not have 'heard Him gladly', but for the truth of what He said. The heart was its own witness to it. The better nature of man, though but for a moment, responded



to it, spoken as it was with authority, and not as the scribes; with simplicity, and not as the great teachers of the law; and sanctified by the life and actions of Him from whose lips it came, and 'Who spake as never man spake'.

And yet, after reviewing the circumstances of the first preaching of the Gospel, there remains something which cannot be resolved into causes or antecedents; which eludes criticism, and can no more be explained in the world than the sudden changes of character in the individual. There are processes of life and organization about which we know nothing, and we seem to know that we shall never know anything. 'That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die'; but the mechanism of this new life is too complex and yet too simple for us to untwist its fibres. The figure which St. Paul applies to the resurrection of the body is true also of the renewal of the soul, especially in the first ages, of which we know so little, and in which the Gospel seems to have acted with such far greater power than among ourselves.

Leaving further inquiry into the conversion of the first Christians at the point at which it hides itself from us in mystery, we have now to turn to a question hardly less mysterious, though seemingly more familiar to us, which may be regarded as a question either of moral philosophy or of theology,—the nature of conversion and changes of character among ourselves. What traces are there of a spiritual power still acting upon the human heart? What is the inward nature, and what are the outward conditions of changes in human conduct? Is our life a gradual and insensible progress from infancy to age, from birth to death, governed by fixed laws; or is it a miracle and mystery of thirty, or fifty, or



seventy years' standing, consisting of so many isolated actions or portions knit together by no common principle?

Were we to consider mankind only from without, there could be no doubt of the answer which we should give to the last of these questions. The order of the world would scarcely even *seem* to be infringed by the free will of man. In morals, no less than in physics, everything would appear to proceed by regular law. Individuals have certain capacities, which grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength; and no one by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature. As the poet says,—‘The boy is father to the man’. The lives of the great majority have a sort of continuity: as we know them by the same look, walk, manner; so when we come to converse with them, we recognize the same character as formerly. They may be changed; but the change in general is such as we expect to find in them from youth to maturity, or from maturity to decay. There is something in them which is not changed, by which we perceive them to be the same. If they were weak, they remain so still; if they were sensitive, they remain so still; if they were selfish or passionate, such faults are seldom cured by increasing age or infirmities. And often the same nature puts on many veils and disguises; to the outward eye it may have, in some instances, almost disappeared; when we look beneath, it is still there.

The appearance of this sameness in human nature has led many to suppose that no real change ever takes place. Does a man from a drunkard become sober? from a knight errant become a devotee? from a sensualist a believer in Christ? or a woman from a life of pleasure pass to a romantic and

devoted religion? It has been maintained that they are the same still; and that deeper similarities remain than the differences which are a part of their new profession. Those who make the remark would say, that such persons exhibit the same vanity, the same irritability, the same ambition; that sensualism still lurks under the disguise of refinement, or earthly and human passion transfuses itself into devotion.

This 'practical fatalism', which says that human beings can be what they are and nothing else, has a certain degree of truth, or rather, of plausibility, from the circumstance that men seldom change wholly, and that the part of their nature which changes least is the weakness and infirmity that shows itself on the surface. Few, comparatively, ever change their outward manner, except from the mere result of altered circumstances; and hence, to a superficial observer, they appear to change less than is really the fact. Probably St. Paul never lost that trembling and feebleness, which was one of the trials of his life. Nor, in so far as the mind is dependent on the body, can we pretend to be wholly free agents. Who can say that his view of life and his power of action are unaffected by his bodily state? or who expects to find a firm and decided character in the nervous and sensitive frame? The commonest facts of daily life sufficiently prove the connexion of mind and body; the more we attend to it the closer it appears. Nor, indeed, can it be denied that external circumstances fix for most men the path of life. They are the inhabitants of a particular country; they have a certain position in the world; they rise to their occupations as the morning comes round; they seldom get beyond the circle of ideas in which they have been brought up. Fearfully and wonderfully as they are made, though

each one in his bodily frame, and even more in his thoughts and feelings, is a miracle of complexity, they seem, as they meet in society, to reunite into a machine, and society itself is the great automaton of which they are the parts. It is harder and more conventional than the individuals which compose it; it exercises a kind of regulating force on the wayward fancies of their wills; it says to them in an unmistakable manner that 'they shall not break their ranks'. The laws of trade, the customs of social life, the instincts of human nature, act upon us with a power little less than that of physical necessity.

If from this external aspect of human things we turn inward, there seems to be no limit to the changes which we deem possible. We are no longer the same, but different every hour. No physical fact interposes itself as an obstacle to our thoughts any more than to our dreams. The world and its laws have nothing to do with our free determinations. At any moment we can begin a new life; in idea at least, no time is required for the change. One instant we may be proud, the next humble; one instant sinning, at the next repenting; one instant, like St. Paul, ready to persecute, at another to preach the Gospel; full of malice and hatred one hour, melting into tenderness the next. As we hear the words of the preacher, there is a voice within telling us, that 'now, even now, is the day of salvation'; and if certain clogs and hindrances of earth could only be removed, we are ready to pass immediately into another state. And, at times, it seems as though we had actually passed into rest, and had a foretaste of the heavenly gift. Something more than imagination enables us to fashion a divine pattern to which we conform for a little while. The



‘new man’ unto which we become transformed, is so pleasant to us that it banishes the thought of ‘the old’. In youth especially, when we are ignorant of the compass of our own nature, such frames of mind are perpetually recurring; perhaps, not without attendant evils; certainly, also, for good.

But besides such feelings as these, which we know to be partly true, partly illusive, every one’s experience of himself appears to teach him, that he has gone through many changes and had many special providences vouchsafed to him; he says to himself that he has been led in a mysterious and peculiar way, not like the way of other men, and had feelings not common to others; he compares different times and places, and contrasts his own conduct here and there, now and then. In other men he remarks similarity of character; in himself he sees chiefly diversity. They seem to be the creatures of habit and circumstance; he alone is a free agent. The truth is, that he observes himself; he cannot equally observe them. He is not conscious of the inward struggles through which they have passed; he sees only the veil of flesh which conceals them from his view. He knows when he thinks about it, but he does not habitually remember, that, under that calm exterior, there is a like current of individual thoughts, feelings, interests, which have as great a charm and intensity for another as the workings of his own mind have for himself.

And yet it does not follow, that this inward fact is to be set aside as the result of egotism and illusion. It may be not merely the dreamy reflection of our life and actions in the mirror of self, but the subtle and delicate spring of the whole machine. To purify the feelings or to move the will, the internal sense may be as necessary to us as external observation is to regulate and sustain them. Even to the formula



of the fatalist, that 'freedom is the consciousness of necessity', it may be replied, that that very consciousness, as he terms it, is as essential as any other link in the chain in which 'he binds fast the world'. Human nature is beset by the contradiction, not of two rival theories, but of many apparently contradictory facts. If we cannot imagine how the world could go on without law and order in human actions, neither can we imagine how morality could subsist unless we clear a space around us for the freedom of the will.

But not in this place to get further into the meshes of the great question of freedom and necessity, let us rather turn aside for a moment to consider some practical aspects of the reflections which precede. Scripture and reason alike require that we should entirely turn to God, that we should obey the whole law. And hard as this may seem at first, there is a witness within us which pleads that it is possible. Our mind and moral nature are one; we cannot break ourselves into pieces in action any more than in thought. The whole man is in every part and in every act. This is not a mere mode of thought, but a truth of great practical importance. 'Easier to change many things than one', is the common saying. Easier, we may add, in religion or morality, to change the whole than the part. Easier because more natural, more agreeable to the voice of conscience and the promises of Scripture. God himself deals with us as a whole; he does not forgive us in part any more than he requires us to serve Him in part. It may be true that, of the thousand hearers of the appeal of the preacher, not above one begins a new life. And some persons will imagine that it might be better to make an impression on them little by little, like the effect of the dropping of water

upon stone. Not in this way is the Gospel written down on the fleshly tables of the heart. More true to our own experience of self, as well as to the words of Scripture, are such ideas as renovation, renewal, regeneration, taking up the cross and following Christ, dying with Christ that we may also live with Him.

Many a person will tease himself by counting minutes and providing small rules for his life, who would have found the task an easier and a nobler one, had he viewed it in its whole extent, and gone to God in a 'large and liberal spirit', to offer up his life to Him. To have no *arrière-pensée* in the service of God and virtue is the great source of peace and happiness. Make clean that which is within, and you have no need to purify that which is without. Take care of the little things of life, and the great ones will take care of themselves, is the maxim of the trader, which is sometimes, and with a certain degree of truth, applied to the service of God. But much more true is it in religion that we should take care of the great things, and the trifles of life will take care of themselves. 'If thine eye be single, thy whole body will be full of light.' Christianity is not acquired as an art by long practice; it does not carve and polish human nature with a graving tool; it makes the whole man; first pouring out his soul before God, and then 'casting him in a mould'. Its workings are not to be measured by time, even though among educated persons, and in modern times, sudden and momentary conversions can rarely occur.

For the doctrine of conversion, the moralist substitutes the theory of habits. Good actions, he says, produce good habits; and the repetition of good actions makes them easier to perform, and 'fortifies us indefinitely against temptation'. There are bodily

and mental habits—habits of reflection and habits of action. Practice gives skill or sleight of hand; constant attention, the faculty of abstraction; so the practice of virtue makes us virtuous, that of vice vicious. The more meat we eat, to use the illustration of Aristotle, in whom we find a cruder form of the same theory, the more we are able to eat meat; the more we wrestle, the more able we are to wrestle, and so forth. If a person has some duty to perform, say of common and trivial sort, to rise at a particular hour in the morning, to be at a particular place at such an hour, to conform to some rule about abstinence, we tell him that he will find the first occasion difficult, the second easy, and the difficulty is supposed to vanish by degrees until it wholly disappears. If a man has to march into a battle, or to perform a surgical operation, or to do anything else from which human nature shrinks, his nerves, we say, are gradually strengthened; his head, as was said of a famous soldier, clears up at the sound of the cannon; like the grave-digger in Hamlet, he has soon no ‘feeling of his occupation’.

From a consideration of such instances as these, the rule has been laid down, that, ‘as the passive impression weakens, the active habit strengthens’. But is not this saying of a great man founded on a narrow and partial contemplation of human nature? For, in the first place, it leaves altogether out of sight the motives of human action; it is equally suited to the most rigid formalist and to a moral and spiritual being. Secondly, it takes no account of the limitation of the power of habits, which neither in mind nor body can be extended beyond a certain point; nor of the original capacity or peculiar character of individuals; nor of the different kinds of habits, nor of the degrees of strength and weak-



ness in different minds ; nor of the enormous difference between youth and age, childhood and manhood, in the capacity for acquiring habits. Old age does not move with accumulated force, either upwards or downwards ; they are the lesser habits, not the great springs of life, that show themselves in it with increased power. Nor can the man who has neglected to form habits in youth, acquire them in mature life ; like the body, the mind ceases to be capable of receiving a particular form. Lastly, such a description of human nature agrees with no man's account of himself ; whatever moralists may say, he knows himself to be a spiritual being. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' and he cannot 'tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth'.

All that is true in the theory of habits seems to be implied in the notion of order or regularity. Even this is inadequate to give a conception of the structure of human beings. Order is the beginning, but freedom is the perfection of our moral nature. Men do not live at random, or act one instant without reference to their actions just before. And in youth especially, the very sameness of our occupations is a sort of stay and support to us, as in age it may be described as a kind of rest. But no one will say that the mere repetition of actions until they constitute a habit, gives any explanation of the higher and nobler forms of human virtue, or the finer moulds of character. Life cannot be explained as the working of a mere machine, still less can moral or spiritual life be reduced to merely mechanical laws.

But if, while acknowledging that a great proportion of mankind are the creatures of habit, and that a great part of our actions are nothing more than the result of habit, we go on to ask ourselves about the changes of our life, and fix our minds on the

critical points, we are led to view human nature, not only in a wider and more generous spirit, but also in a way more accordant with the language of Scripture. We no longer measure ourselves by days or by weeks; we are conscious that at particular times we have undergone great revolutions or emotions; and then, again, have intervened periods, lasting perhaps for years, in which we have pursued the even current of our way. Our progress towards good may have been in idea an imperceptible and regular advance; in fact, we know it to have been otherwise. We have taken plunges in life; there are many eras noted in our existence. The greatest changes are those of which we are the least able to give an account, and which we feel the most disposed to refer to a superior power. That they were simply mysterious, like some utterly unknown natural phenomena, is our first thought about them. But although unable to fathom their true nature, we are capable of analysing many of the circumstances which accompany them, and of observing the impulses out of which they arise.

Every man has the power of forming a resolution, or, without previous resolution, in any particular instance, acting as he will. As thoughts come into the mind one cannot tell how, so too motives spring up, without our being able to trace their origin. Why we suddenly see a thing in a new light, is often hard to explain; why we feel an action to be right or wrong which has previously seemed indifferent, is not less inexplicable. We fix the passing dream or sentiment in action; the thought is nothing, the deed may be everything. That day after day, to use a familiar instance, the drunkard will find abstinence easier, is probably untrue; but that from once abstaining he will gain a fresh experience, and

receive a new strength and inward satisfaction, which may result in endless consequences, is what every one is aware of. It is not the sameness of what we do, but its novelty, which seems to have such a peculiar power over us; not the repetition of many blind actions, but the performance of a single conscious one, that is the birth to a new life. Indeed, the very sameness of actions is often accompanied with a sort of weariness, which makes men desirous of change.

Nor is it less true, that by the commission, not of many, but a single act of vice or crime, an inroad is made into our whole moral constitution, which is not proportionably increased by its repetition. The first act of theft, falsehood, or other immorality, is an event in the life of the perpetrator which he never forgets. It may often happen that no account can be given of it; that there is nothing in the education, nor in the antecedents of the person, that would lead us, or even himself, to suspect it. In the weaker sort of natures, especially, suggestions of evil spring up we cannot tell how. Human beings are the creatures of habit; but they are the creatures of impulse too; and from the greater variableness of the outward circumstances of life, and especially of particular periods of life, and the greater freedom of individuals, it may, perhaps, be found that human actions, though less liable to wide-spread or sudden changes, have also become more capricious, and less reducible to simple causes, than formerly.

Changes in character come more often in the form of feeling than of reason, from some new affection or attachment, or alienation of our former self, rather than from the slow growth of experience, or a deliberate sense of right and duty. The meeting with some particular person, the remembrance of some particular scene, the last words of a parent or



friend, the reading of a sentence in a book, may call forth a world within us of the very existence of which we were previously unconscious. New interests arise such as we never before knew, and we can no longer lie grovelling in the mire, but must be up and doing; new affections seem to be drawn out, such as warm our inmost soul and make action and exertion a delight to us. Mere human love at first sight, as we say, has been known to change the whole character and produce an earthly effect, analogous to that heavenly love of Christ and the brethren, of which the New Testament speaks. Have we not seen the passionate become calm, the licentious pure, the weak strong, the scoffer devout? We may not venture to say with St. Paul, 'This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church'. But such instances serve, at least, to quicken our sense of the depth and subtlety of human nature.

Of many of these changes no other reason can be given than that nature and the Author of nature have made men capable of them. There are others, again, which we seem to trace, not only to particular times, but to definite actions, from which they flow in the same manner that other effects follow from their causes. Among such causes none are more powerful than acts of self-sacrifice and devotion. A single deed of heroism makes a man a hero; it becomes a part of him, and, strengthened by the approbation and sympathy of his fellow men, a sort of power which he gains over himself and them. Something like this is true of the lesser occasions of life no less than of the greatest; provided in either case the actions are not of such a kind that the performance of them is a violence to our nature. Many a one has stretched himself on the rack of

asceticism, without on the whole raising his nature ; often he has seemed to have gained in self-control only what he has lost in the kindlier affections, and by his very isolation to have wasted the opportunities which nature offered him of self-improvement. But no one with a heart open to human feelings, loving not man the less, but God more, sensitive to the happiness of this world, yet aiming at a higher,—no man of such a nature ever made a great sacrifice, or performed a great act of self-denial, without impressing a change on his character, which lasted to his latest breath. No man ever took his besetting sin, it may be lust, or pride, or love of rank and position, and, as it were, cut it out by voluntarily placing himself where to gratify it was impossible, without sensibly receiving a new strength of character. In one day, almost in an hour, he may become an altered man ; he may stand, as it were, on a different stage of moral and religious life ; he may feel himself in new relations to an altered world.

Nor, in considering the effects of action, must the influence of impressions be lost sight of. Good resolutions are apt to have a bad name ; they have come to be almost synonymous with the absence of good actions. As they get older, men deem it a kind of weakness to be guilty of making them ; so often do they end in raising ‘pictures of virtue, or going over the theory of virtue in our minds’. Yet this contrast between passive impression and active habit is hardly justified by our experience of ourselves or others. Valueless as they are in themselves, good resolutions are suggestive of great good ; they are seldom wholly without effect on our conduct ; in the weakest of men they are still the embryo of action. They may meet with a concurrence of circumstances in which they take root

and grow, coinciding with some change of place, or of pursuits, or of companions, or of natural constitution, in which they acquire a peculiar power. They are the opportunities of virtue, if not virtue itself. At the worst they make us think; they give us an experience of ourselves; they prevent our passing our lives in total unconsciousness. A man may go on all his life making and not keeping them; miserable as such a state appears, he is perhaps not the worse, but something the better for them. The voice of the preacher is not lost, even if he succeed but for a few instants in awakening them.

A further cause of sudden changes in the moral constitution is the determination of the will by reason and knowledge. Suppose the case of a person living in a narrow circle of ideas, within the limits of his early education, perplexed by difficulties, yet never venturing beyond the wall of prejudices in which he has been brought up, or changing only into the false position of a rebellion against them. A new view of his relation to the world and to God is presented to him; such, for example, as in St. Paul's day was the grand acknowledgement that God was 'not the God of the Jews only'; such as in our own age would be the clear vision of the truth and justice of God, high above the clouds of earth and time, and of His goodwill to man. Convinced of the reasonableness of the Gospel, it becomes to him at once a self-imposed law. No longer does the human heart rebel; no longer has he 'to pose his understanding' with that odd resolution of Tertullian,—'certum quia impossibile'. He perceives that the perplexities of religion have been made, not by the appointment of God, but by the ingenuity of man.

Lastly. Among those influences, by the help of



which the will of man learns to disengage itself from the power of habit, must not be omitted the influence of circumstances. If men are creatures of habit, much more are they creatures of circumstances. These two, nature without us, and 'the second nature' that is within, are the counterbalancing forces of our being. Between them (so we may figure to ourselves the working of the mind) the human will inserts itself, making the force of one a lever against the other, and seeming to rule both. We fall under the power of habit, and feel ourselves weak and powerless to shake off the almost physical influence which it exerts upon us. The enfeebled frame cannot rid itself of the malady; the palsied springs of action cannot be strengthened for good, nor fortified against evil. Transplanted into another soil, and in a different air, we renew our strength. In youth especially, the character seems to respond kindly to the influence of the external world. Providence has placed us in a state in which we have many aids in the battle with self; the greatest of these is change of circumstances.

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We have wandered far from the subject of conversion in the early Church, into another sphere in which the words 'grace, faith, the spirit', have disappeared, and notions of moral philosophy have taken their place. It is better, perhaps, that the attempt to analyse our spiritual nature should assume this abstract form. We feel that words cannot express the life hidden with Christ and God; we are afraid of declaring on the housetop, what may only be spoken in the closet. If the rights and ceremonies of the elder dispensation, which have so little in them of a spiritual character, became a figure

of the true, much more may the moral world be regarded as a figure of the spiritual world of which religion speaks to us.

There is a view of the changes of the characters of men which begins where this ends, which reads human nature by a different light, and speaks of it as the seat of a great struggle between the powers of good and evil. It would be untrue to identify this view with that which has preceded, and scarcely less untrue to attempt to interweave the two in a system of 'moral theology'. No addition of theological terms will transfigure Aristotle's Ethics into a 'Summa Theologiae'. When St. Paul says—'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord'; he is not speaking the language of moral philosophy, but of religious feeling. He expresses what few have truly felt concentrated in a single instant, what many have deluded themselves into the belief of, what some have experienced accompanying them through life, what a great portion even of the better sort of mankind are wholly unconscious of. It seems as if Providence allowed us to regard the truths of religion and morality in many ways which are not wholly unconnected with each other, yet parallel rather than intersecting; providing for the varieties of human character, and not leaving those altogether without law, who are incapable in a world of sight of entering within the veil.

As we return to that 'hidden life' of which the Scripture speaks, our analysis of human nature seems to become more imperfect, less reducible to rule or measure, less capable of being described in a language which all men understand. What the believer recognizes as the record of his experience

is apt to seem mystical to the rest of the world. We do not seek to thread the mazes of the human soul, or to draw forth to the light its hidden communion with its Maker, but only to present in general outline the power of religion among other causes of human action.

Directly, religious influences may be summed up under three heads:—The power of God; the love of Christ; the efficacy of prayer.

(1) So far as the influence of the first of these is capable of analysis, it consists in the practical sense that we are dependent beings, and that our souls are in the hands of God, who is acting through us, and ever present with us, in the trials of life and in the work of life. The believer is a minister who executes this work, hardly the partner in it; it is not his own, but God's. He does it with the greatest care, as unto the Lord and not to men, yet is indifferent as to the result, knowing that all things, even through his imperfect agency, are working together for good. The attitude of his soul towards God is such as to produce the strongest effects on his power of action. It leaves his faculties clear and unimpassioned; it places him above accidents; it gives him courage and freedom. Trusting in God only, like the Psalmist, 'he fears no enemy'; he has no want. There is a sort of absoluteness in his position in the world, which can neither be made better nor worse; as St. Paul says, 'All things are his, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come'.

In merely human things, the aid and sympathy of others increase our power to act: it is also the fact that we can work more effectually and think more truly, where the issue is not staked on the result of our thought and work. The confidence of success



would be more than half the secret of success, did it not also lead to the relaxation of our efforts. But in the life of the believer, the sympathy, if such a figure of speech may be allowed, is not human but Divine; the confidence is not a confidence in ourselves, but in the power of God, which at once takes us out of ourselves and increases our obligation to exertion. The instances just mentioned have an analogy, though but a faint one, with that which we are considering. They are shadows of the support which we receive from the Infinite and Everlasting. As the philosopher said that his theory of fatalism was absolutely required to insure the repose necessary for moral action, it may be said, in a far higher sense, that the consciousness of a Divine Providence is necessary to enable a rational being to meet the present trials of life, and to look without fear on his future destiny.

(2) But yet more strongly is it felt that the love of Christ has this constraining power over souls, that here, if anywhere, we are unlocking the twisted chain of sympathy, and reaching the inmost mystery of human nature. The sight, once for all, of Christ crucified, recalling the thought of what, more than 1800 years ago, he suffered for us, has ravished the heart and melted the affections, and made the world seem new, and covered the earth itself with a fair vision, that is, a heavenly one. The strength of this feeling arises from its being directed towards a person, a real being, an individual like ourselves, who has actually endured all this for our sakes, who was above us, and yet became one of us and felt as we did, and was like ourselves a true man. The love which He felt towards us, we seek to return to Him; the unity which He has with the Divine nature, He communicates to us; His Father is our Father, His God our

God. And as human love draws men onwards to make sacrifices, and to undergo sufferings for the good of others, Divine love also leads us to cast away the interests of this world, and rest only in the noblest object of love. And this love is not only a feeling or sentiment, or attachment, such as we may entertain towards a parent, a child, or a wife, in which, pure and disinterested as it may be, some shadow of earthly passion unavoidably mingles; it is also the highest exercise of the reason, which it seems to endow with the force of the affections, making us think and feel at once. And although it begins in gentleness, and tenderness, and weakness, and is often supposed to be more natural to women than men, yet it grows up also to 'the fulness of the stature of the perfect man'. The truest note of the depth and sincerity of our feelings towards our fellow creatures is a manly,—that is, a self-controlled—temper: still more is this true of the love of the soul towards Christ and God.

Every one knows what it is to become like those whom we admire or esteem; the impress which a disciple may sometimes have received from his teacher, or the servant from his Lord. Such devotion to a particular person can rarely be thought to open our hearts to love others also; it often tends to weaken the force of individual character. But the love of Christ is the conducting medium to the love of all mankind; the image which He impresses upon us is the image not of any particular individual, but of the Son of Man. And this image, as we draw nearer to it, is transfigured into the image of the Son of God. As we become like Him, we see Him as He is; and see ourselves and all other things with true human sympathy. Lastly, we are sensible that more than all we feel towards Him, He feels towards

us, and that it is He who is drawing us to Him, while we seem to be drawing to Him ourselves. This is a part of that mystery of which the Apostle speaks, 'of the length, and depth, and breadth of the love of Christ' which passeth knowledge. Mere human love rests on instincts, the working of which we cannot explain, but which nevertheless touch the inmost springs of our being. So, too, we have spiritual instincts, acting towards higher objects, still more suddenly and wonderfully capturing our souls in an instant, and making us indifferent to all things else. Such instincts show themselves in the weak no less than in the strong; they seem to be not so much an original part of our nature as to fulfil our nature, and add to it, and draw it out, until they make us different beings to ourselves and others. It was the quaint fancy of a sentimentalist to ask whether any one who remembers the first sight of a beloved person, could doubt the existence of magic. We may ask another question, Can any one who has ever known the love of Christ, doubt the existence of a spiritual power?

(3) The instrument whereby, above all others, we realize the power of God, and the love of Christ, which carries us into their presence, and places us within the circle of a Divine yet personal influence, is prayer. Prayer is the summing up of the Christian life in a definite act, which is at once inward and outward, the power of which on the character, like that of any other act, is proportioned to its intensity. The imagination of doing rightly adds little to our strength; even the wish to do so is not necessarily accompanied by a change of heart and conduct. But in prayer we imagine, and wish, and perform all in one. Our imperfect resolutions are offered up to God; our weakness becomes strength, our words deeds. No other action is so mysterious; there is



none in which we seem, in the same manner, to renounce ourselves that we may be one with God.

Of what nature that prayer is which is effectual to the obtaining of its requests is a question of the same kind as what constitutes a true faith. That prayer, we should reply, which is itself most of an act, which is most immediately followed by action, which is most truthful, manly, self-controlled, which seems to lead and direct, rather than to follow, our natural emotions. That prayer which is its own answer because it asks not for any temporal good, but for union with God. That prayer which begins with the confession, 'We know not what to pray for as we ought'; which can never by any possibility interfere with the laws of nature, because even in extremity of danger or suffering, it seeks only the fulfilment of His will. That prayer which acknowledges that our enemies, or those of a different faith, are equally with ourselves in the hands of God; in which we never unwittingly ask for our own good at the expense of others. That prayer in which faith is strong enough to submit to experience; in which the soul of man is nevertheless conscious not of any self-produced impression, but of a true communion with the Author and Maker of his being.

In prayer, as in all religion, there is something that it is impossible to describe, and that seems to be untrue the moment it is expressed in words. In the relations of man with God, it is vain to attempt to separate what belongs to the finite and what to the infinite. We can feel, but we cannot analyse it. We can lay down practical rules for it, but can give no adequate account of it. It is a mystery which we do not need to fathom. In all religion there is an element of which we are conscious—which is no mystery, which ought to be and is on a level with reason and experience. There is something besides,

which, in those who give way to every vague spiritual emotion, may often fall below reason (for to them it becomes a merely physical state); which may also raise us above ourselves, until reason and feeling meet in one, and the life on earth even of the poor and ignorant answers to the description of the Apostle, 'Having your conversation in heaven'.

This partial indistinctness of the subject of religion, even independently of mysticism or superstition, may become to intellectual minds a ground for doubting the truth of that which will not be altogether reduced to the rules of human knowledge, which seems to elude our grasp, and retires into the recesses of the soul the moment we ask for the demonstration of its existence. Against this natural suspicion let us set two observations: first, that if the Gospel had spoken to the reason only, and not to the feelings—if 'the way to the blessed life' had to be won by clearness of ideas, then it is impossible that 'to the poor the Gospel should have been first preached'. It would have begun at the other end of society, and probably remained, like Greek philosophy, the abstraction of educated men. Secondly, let us remark that even now, judged by its effects, the power of religion is of all powers the greatest. Knowledge itself is a weak instrument to stir the soul compared with religion; morality has no way to the heart of man; but the Gospel reaches the feelings and the intellect at once. In nations as well as individuals, in barbarous times as well as civilized, in the great crises of history especially, even in the latest ages, when the minds of men seem to wax cold, and all things remain the same as at the beginning, it has shown itself to be a reality without which human nature would cease to be what it is. Almost every one has had the witness of it in himself. No one, says Plato, ever passed from youth to age in unbelief of the gods, in heathen times.

Hardly any educated person in a Christian land has passed from youth to age without some aspiration after a better life, some thought of the country to which he is going.

As a fact, it would be admitted by most, that, at some period of their lives, the thought of the world to come and of future judgement, the beauty and loveliness of the truths of the Gospel, the sense of the shortness of our days here, have wrought a more quickening and powerful effect than any moral truths or prudential maxims. Many a one would acknowledge that he has been carried whither he knew not; and had nobler thoughts, and felt higher aspirations, than the course of his ordinary life seemed to allow. These were the most important moments of his life for good or for evil; the critical points which have made him what he is, either as he used or neglected them. They came he knew not how, sometimes with some outward and apparent cause, at other times without,—the result of affliction or sickness, or ‘the wind blowing where it listeth’.

And if such changes and such critical points should be found to occur in youth more often than in age, in the poor and ignorant rather than in the educated, in women more often than in men,—if reason and reflection seem to weaken as they regulate the springs of human action, this very fact may lead us to consider that reason, and reflection, and education, and the experience of age, and the force of manly sense, are not the links which bind us to the communion of the body of Christ; that it is rather to those qualities which we have, or may have, in common with our fellow men, that the Gospel is promised; and that it is with the weak, the poor, the babes in Christ,—not with the strong-minded, the resolute, the consistent,—that we shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.



# ESSAY ON CASUISTRY

## ROMANS XIV

RELIGION and morality seem often to become entangled in circumstances. The truth which came, not 'to bring peace upon earth, but a sword', could not but give rise to many new and conflicting obligations. The kingdom of God had to adjust itself with the kingdoms of this world; though 'the children were free', they could not escape the fulfilment of duties to their Jewish or Roman governors; in the bosom of a family there were duties too: in society there were many points of contact with the heathen. A new element of complexity had been introduced in all the relations between man and man, giving rise to many new questions, which might be termed, in the phraseology of modern times, 'cases of conscience'.

Of these the one which most frequently recurs in the Epistles of St. Paul, is the question respecting meats and drinks, which appears to have agitated both the Roman and Corinthian Churches, as well as those of Jerusalem and Antioch, and probably, in a greater or less degree, every other Christian community in the days of the Apostle. The scruple which gave birth to it was not confined to Christianity; it was Eastern rather than Christian, and originated in a feeling into which entered, not only Oriental notions of physical purity and impurity, but also those of caste and of race. With other Eastern influences it spread towards the West, in the flux of

all religions, exercising a peculiar power on the susceptible temper of mankind.

The same tendency exhibited itself in various forms. In one form it was the scruple of those who ate herbs, while others 'had faith' to eat anything. The Essenes and Therapeutae among the Jews, and the Pythagoreans in the heathen world, had a similar feeling respecting the use of animal food. It was a natural association which led to such an abstinence. In the East, ever ready to connect, or rather incapable of separating, ideas of moral and physical impurity,—where the heat of the climate rendered animal food unnecessary, if not positively unhealthy; where corruption rapidly infected dead organized matter; where, lastly, ancient tradition and ceremonies told of the sacredness of animals and the mysteriousness of animal life,—nature and religion alike seemed to teach the same lesson, it was safer to abstain. It was the manner of such a scruple to propagate itself. He who revolted at animal food could not quietly sit by and see his neighbour partake of it. The ceremonialism of the age was the tradition of thousands of years, and passed by a sort of contagion from one race to another, from Paganism or Judaism to Christianity. How to deal with this 'second nature' was a practical difficulty among the first Christians. The Gospel was not a gospel according to the Essenes, and the church could not exclude those who held the scruples, neither could it be narrowed to them; it would not pass judgement on them at all. Hence the force of the Apostle's words: 'Him that is weak in the faith receive, not to the decision of his doubts.'

There was another point in reference to which the same spirit of ceremonialism propagated itself, viz. meats offered to idols. Even if meat in general

were innocent and a creature of God, it could hardly be a matter of indifference to partake of that which had been 'sacrificed to devils'; least of all, to sit at meat in the idol's temple. True, the idol was 'nothing in the world'—a block of stone, to which the words good or evil were misapplied; 'a graven image' which the workman made, 'putting his hand to the hammer', as the old prophets described in their irony. And such is the Apostle's own feeling (1 Cor. viii. 4; x. 19). But he has also the other feeling which he himself regards as not less true (1 Cor. x. 20), and which was more natural to the mind of the first believers. When they saw the worshippers of the idol revelling in impurity, they could not but suppose that a spirit of some kind was there. Their warfare, as the Apostle had told them, was not 'against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world'. Evil angels were among them; where would they more naturally take up their abode than around the altars and in the temples of the heathen? And if they had been completely free from superstition, and could have regarded the heathen religions which they saw enthroned over the world simply with contempt, still the question would have arisen, What connexion were they to have with them and with their worshippers? a question not easy to be answered in the bustle of Rome and Corinth, where every circumstance of daily life, every amusement, every political and legal right, was in some way bound up with the heathen religions. Were they to go out of the world? if not, what was to be their relation to those without?

A third instance of the same ceremonialism so natural to that age, and to ourselves so strange and unmeaning, is illustrated by the words of the Jeru-



salem Christians to the Apostle,—‘Thou wentest in unto men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them’; a scruple so strong that, probably, St. Peter himself was never entirely free from it, and at any rate yielded to the fear of it in others when withstood by St. Paul at Antioch. This scruple may be said in one sense to be hardly capable of an explanation, and in another not to need one. For, probably, nothing can give our minds any conception of the nature of the feeling, the intense hold which it exercised, the concentration which it was of every national and religious prejudice, the constraint which was required to get rid of it as a sort of *horror naturalis* in the minds of Jews; while, on the other hand, feelings at the present day not very dissimilar exist, not only in Eastern countries, but among ourselves. There is nothing strange in human nature being liable to them, or in their long lingering and often returning, even when reason and charity alike condemn them. We ourselves are not insensible to differences of race and colour, and may therefore be able partially to comprehend (allowing for the difference of East and West) what was the feeling of Jews and Jewish Christians towards men uncircumcised.

On the last point St. Paul maintains but one language:—‘In Christ Jesus there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.’ No compromise could be allowed here, without destroying the Gospel that he preached. But the other question of meats and drinks, when separated from that of circumcision, admitted of various answers and points of view. Accordingly there is an appearance of inconsistency in the modes in which the Apostle resolves it. All these modes have a use and interest for ourselves; though our difficulties are not the same as those of the early Christians, the words speak to us, so long

as prudence, and faith, and charity are the guides of Christian life. It is characteristic of the Apostle that his answers run into one another, as though each of them to different individuals, and all in their turn, might present the solution of the difficulty.

We may begin with 1 Cor. x. 25, which may be termed the rule of Christian prudence: 'Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake.' That is to say: 'Buy food as other men do; perhaps what you purchase has come from the idol's temple, perhaps not. Do not encourage your conscience in raising scruples, life will become impossible if you do. One question involves another and another and another without end. The manly and the Christian way is to cut them short; both as tending to weaken the character and as inconsistent with the very nature of spiritual religion.'

So we may venture to amplify the Apostle's precept, which breathes the same spirit of moderation as his decisions respecting celibacy and marriage. Among ourselves the remark is often made that 'extremes are practically untrue'. This is another way of putting the same lesson:—If I may not sit in the idol's temple, it may be plausibly argued, neither may I eat meats offered to idols; and if I may not eat meats offered to idols, then it logically follows that I ought not to go into the market where idols' meat is sold. The Apostle snaps the chain of this misapplied logic: there must be a limit somewhere; we must not push consistency where it is practically impossible. A trifling scruple is raised to the level of a religious duty, and another and another, until religion is made up of scruples, and the light of life fades, and the ways of life narrow themselves.

It is not hard to translate the Apostle's precept

into the language of our time. Instances occur in politics, in theology, in our ordinary occupations, in which beyond a certain point consistency is impossible. Take for example the following :—A person feels that he would be wrong in carrying on his business, or going to public amusements, on a Sunday. He says : If it be wrong for me to work, it is wrong to make the servants in my house work ; or if it be wrong to go to public amusements, it is wrong to enjoy the recreation of walking on a Sunday. So it may be argued that, because slavery is wrong, therefore it is not right to purchase the produce of slavery, or that of which the produce of slavery is a part, and so on without end, until we are forced out of the world from a remote fear of contagion with evil. Or I am engaged in a business which may be in some degree deleterious to the health or injurious to the morals of those employed in it, or I trade in some articles of commerce which are unwholesome or dangerous, or I let a house or a ship to another whose employment is of this description. Numberless questions of the same kind relating to the profession of a clergyman, an advocate, or a soldier, have been pursued into endless consequences. Is the mind of any person so nicely balanced that ‘every one of six hundred disputed propositions’ is the representative of his exact belief? or can every word in a set form of prayer at all times reflect the feeling of those who read or follow it? There is no society to which we can belong, no common act of business or worship in which two or three are joined together, in which such difficulties are not liable to arise. Three editors conduct a newspaper, can it express equally the conviction of all the three? Three lawyers sign an opinion in common, is it the judgement of all or



of one or two of them? High-minded men have often got themselves into a false position by regarding these questions in too abstract a way. The words of the Apostle are a practical answer to them which may be paraphrased thus: 'Do as other men do in a Christian country.' Conscience will say, 'He who is guilty of the least, is guilty of all'. In the Apostle's language it then becomes 'the strength of sin', encouraging us to despair of all, because in that mixed condition of life in which God has placed us we cannot fulfil all.

In accordance with the spirit of the same principle of doing as other men do, the Apostle further implies that believers are to accept the hospitality of the heathen (1 Cor. x. 27). But here a modification comes in, which may be termed the law of Christian charity or courtesy:—Avoid giving offence, or, as we might say, 'Do not defy opinion'. Eat what is set before you; but if a person sitting at meat pointedly says to you, 'This was offered to idols', do not eat. 'All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient', and this is one of the not-expedient class. There appears to be a sort of inconsistency in this advice, as there must always be inconsistency in the rules of practical life which are relative to circumstances. It might be said: 'We cannot do one thing at one time, and another thing at another; now be guided by another man's conscience, now by our own.' It might be retorted, 'Is not this the dissimulation which you blame in St. Peter?' To which it may be answered in turn: 'But a man may do one thing at one time, another thing at another time, "becoming to the Jews a Jew," if he do it in such a manner as to avoid the risk of misconstruction.' And this again admits of a retort: 'Is it possible to avoid misconstruction? Is it not better

to dare to be ourselves, to act like ourselves, to speak like ourselves, to think like ourselves?' We seem to have lighted unawares on two varieties of human disposition; the one harmonizing and adapting itself to the perplexities of life, the other rebelling against them, and seeking to disentangle itself from them. Which side of this argument shall we take; neither or both? The Apostle appears to take both sides; for in the abrupt transition that follows, he immediately adds, 'Why is my liberty to be judged of another man's conscience? what right has another man to attack me for what I do in the innocence of my heart?' It is good advice to say, 'Regard the opinions of others'; and equally good advice to say, 'Do not regard the opinions of others'. We must balance between the two; and over all, adjusting the scales, is the law of Christian love.

Both in 1 Cor. viii. and Rom. xiv. the Apostle adds another principle, which may be termed the law of individual conscience, which we must listen to in ourselves and regard in others. 'He that doubteth is damned; whatsoever is not of faith is sin.' All things are lawful to him who feels them to be lawful, but the conscience may be polluted by the most indifferent things. When we eat, we should remember that the consequence of following our example may be serious to others. For not only may our brother be offended at us, but also by our example be drawn into sin; that is, to do what, though indifferent in itself, is sin to him. And so the weak brother, for whom Christ died, may perish through our fault; that is, he may lose his peace and harmony of soul and conscience void of offence, and all through our heedlessness in doing some unnecessary thing, which were far better left undone.

Cases may be readily imagined, in which, like the

preceding, the rule of conduct here laid down by the Apostle would involve dissimulation. So many thousand scruples and opinions as there are in the world, we should have 'to go out of the world' to fulfil it honestly. All reserve, it may be argued, tends to break up the confidence between man and man; and there are times in which concealment of our opinions, even respecting things indifferent, would be treacherous and mischievous; there are times, too, in which things cease to be indifferent, and it is our duty to speak out respecting the false importance which they have acquired. But, after all qualifications of this kind have been made, the secondary duty yet remains, of consideration for others, which should form an element in our conduct. If truth is the first principle of our speech and action, the good of others should, at any rate, be the second. 'If any man (not see thee who hast knowledge sitting in the idol's temple, but) hear thee discoursing rashly of the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church, shall not the faith of thy younger brother become confused? and his conscience being weak shall cease to discern between good and evil. And so thy weak brother shall perish for whom Christ died.'

The Apostle adds a fourth principle, which may be termed the law of Christian freedom, as the last solution of the difficulty: 'Therefore, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.' From the perplexities of casuistry, and the conflicting rights of a man's own conscience and that of another, he falls back on the simple rule, 'Whatever you do, sanctify the act'. It cannot be said that all contradictory obligations vanish the moment we try to act with simplicity and truth; we cannot change the current of life and its circumstances by a wish or an intention; we cannot dispel that which is without, though



we may clear that which is within. But we have taken the first step, and are in the way to solve the riddle. The insane scruple, the fixed idea, the ever-increasing doubt begins to pass away; the spirit of the child returns to us; the mind is again free, and the road of life open. 'Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God'; that is, determine to seek only the will of God, and you may have a larger measure of Christian liberty allowed to you; things, perhaps wrong in others, may be right for you.

Questions of meats and drinks, of eating with washen or unwashen hands, and the like, have passed from the stage of religious ordinances to that of proprieties and decencies of life. The purifications of the law of Moses are no longer binding upon Christians. Nature herself teaches all things necessary for health and comfort. But the spirit of casuistry in every age finds fresh materials to employ itself upon, laying hold of some question of a new moon or a sabbath, some fragment of antiquity, some inconsistency of custom, some subtlety of thought, some nicety of morality, analysing and dividing the actions of daily life; separating the letter from the spirit, and words from things; winding its toils around the infirmities of the weak, and linking itself to the sensibility of the intellect.

Out of this labyrinth of the soul the believer finds his way, by keeping his eye fixed on that landmark which the Apostle himself has set up: 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.'

There is no one probably, of any religious experience, who has not at times felt the power of a scrupulous conscience. In speaking of a scrupulous conscience, the sense of remorse for greater offences is not intended to be included. These may press more

or less heavily on the soul ; and the remembrance of them may ingrain itself, with different degrees of depth, on different temperaments ; but whether deep or shallow, the sorrow for them cannot be brought under the head of scruples of conscience. There are ‘many things in which we offend all’, about which there can be no mistake, the impression of which on our minds it would be fatal to weaken or do away. Nor is it to be denied that there may be customs almost universal among us which are so plainly repugnant to morality, that we can never be justified in acquiescing in them ; or that individuals of clear head and strong will have been led on by feelings which other men would deride as conscientious scruples into an heroic struggle against evil. But quite independently of real sorrows for sin, or real protests against evil, most religious persons in the course of their lives have felt unreal scruples or difficulties, or exaggerated real but slight ones ; they have abridged their Christian freedom, and thereby their means of doing good ; they have cherished imaginary obligations, and artificially hedged themselves in a particular course of action. Honour and truth have seemed to be at stake about trifles light as air, or conscience has become a burden too heavy for them to bear in some doubtful matter of conduct. Scruples of this kind are ever liable to increase ; as one vanishes, another appears ; the circumstances of the world and of the Church, and the complication of modern society, have a tendency to create them. The very form in which they come is of itself sufficient to put us on our guard against them ; for we can give no account of them to ourselves ; they are seldom affected by the opinion of others ; they are more often put down by the exercise of authority than by reasoning or judgement. They gain hold

on the weaker sort of men, or on those not naturally weak, in moments of weakness. They often run counter to our wish or interest, and for this very reason acquire a kind of tenacity. They seem innocent, mistakes, at worst, on the safe side, characteristic of the ingenuousness of youth, or indicative of a heart uncorrupted by the world. But this is not so. Creatures as we are of circumstances, we cannot safely afford to give up things indifferent, means of usefulness, instruments of happiness to ourselves, which may affect our lives and those of our children to the latest posterity. There are few greater dangers in religion than the indulgence of such scruples, the consequences of which can rarely be seen until too late, and which affect the moral character of a man at least as much as his temporal interests.

Strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that scruples about lesser matters almost always involve some dereliction of duty in greater or more obvious ones. A tender conscience is a conscience unequal to the struggles of life. At first sight it seems as if, when lesser duties were cared for, the greater would take care of themselves. But this is not the lesson which experience teaches. In our moral as in our physical nature, we are finite beings, capable only of a certain degree of tension, ever liable to suffer disorder and derangement, to be over-exercised in one part and weakened in another. No one can fix his mind intently on a trifling scruple or become absorbed in an eccentric fancy, without finding the great principles of truth and justice insensibly depart from him. He has been looking through a microscope at life, and cannot take in its general scope. The moral proportions of things are lost to him; the question of a new moon or a Sabbath has taken the place of diligence or of honesty. There is



no limit to the illusions which he may practise on himself. There are those, all whose interests and prejudices at once take the form of duties and scruples, partly from dishonesty, but also from weakness, and because that is the form in which they can with the best grace maintain them against other men, and conceal their true nature from themselves.

Scruples are dangerous in another way, as they tend to drive men into a corner in which the performance of our duty becomes so difficult as to be almost impossible. A virtuous and religious life does not consist merely in abstaining from evil, but in doing what is good. It has to find opportunities and occasions for itself, without which it languishes. A man has a scruple about the choice of a profession; as a Christian, he believes war to be unlawful; in familiar language, he has doubts respecting orders, difficulties about the law. Even the ordinary ways of conducting trade appear deficient to his nicer sense of honesty; or perhaps he has already entered on one of these lines of life, and finds it necessary to quit it. At last, there comes the difficulty of 'how he is to live'. There cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that a good resolution is sufficient in such a case to carry a man through a long life.

But even if we suppose the case of one who is endowed with every earthly good and instrument of prosperity, who can afford, as is sometimes said, to trifle with the opportunities of life, still the mental consequences will be hardly less injurious to him. For he who feels scruples about the ordinary enjoyments and occupations of his fellows, does so far cut himself off from his common nature. He is an isolated being, incapable of acting with his fellow men. There are plants which, though the sun shine

upon them, and the dews water them, peak and pine from some internal disorder, and appear to have no sympathy with the influences around them. So is the mind corroded by scruples of conscience. It cannot expand to sun or shower; it belongs not to the world of light; it has no intelligence of or harmony with mankind around. It is insensible to the great truth, that though we may not do evil that good may come, yet that good and evil, truth and falsehood, are bound together on earth, and that we cannot separate ourselves from them.

It is one of the peculiar dangers of scruples of conscience, that the consequence of giving way to them is never felt at the time that they press upon us. When the mind is worried by a thought secretly working in it, and its trial becomes greater than it can bear, it is eager to take the plunge in life that may put it out of its misery; to throw aside a profession it may be, or to enter a new religious communion. We shall not be wrong in promising ourselves a few weeks of peace and placid enjoyment. The years that are to follow we are incapable of realizing; whether the weary spirit will require some fresh pasture, will invent for itself some new doubt; whether its change is a return to nature or not, it is impossible for us to anticipate. Whether it has in itself that hidden strength which, under every change of circumstances, is capable of bearing up, is a question which we are the least able to determine for ourselves. In general we may observe, that the weakest minds, and those least capable of enduring such consequences, are the most likely to indulge the scruples. We know beforehand the passionate character, hidden often under the mask of reserve, the active yet half-reasoning intellect, which falls under the power of such illusions.

In the Apostolic Church 'cases of conscience' arose out of religious traditions, and what may be termed the ceremonial cast of the age; in modern times the most frequent source of them may be said to be the desire of logical or practical consistency, such as is irreconcilable with the mixed state of human affairs and the feebleness of the human intellect. There is no lever like the argument from consistency, with which to bring men over to our opinions. A particular system or view, Calvinism perhaps, or Catholicism, has taken possession of the mind. Shall we stop short of pushing its premises to their conclusions? Shall we stand in the midway, where we are liable to be over-ridden by the combatants on either side in the struggle? Shall we place ourselves between our reason and our affections: between our practical duties and our intellectual convictions? Logic would have us go forward, and take our stand at the most advanced point—we are there already, it is urged, if we were true to ourselves,—but feeling, and habit, and common sense bid us stay where we are, unable to give an account of ourselves, yet convinced that we are right. We may listen to the one voice, we may listen also to the other. The true way of guiding either is to acknowledge both; to use them for a time against each other, until experience of life and of ourselves has taught us to harmonize them in a single principle.

So, again, in daily life cases often occur, in which we must do as other men do, and act upon a general understanding, even though unable to reconcile a particular practice to the letter of truthfulness or even to our individual conscience. It is hard in such cases to lay down a definite rule. But in general we should be suspicious of any conscientious scruples in which other good men do not share. We shall do right to



make a large allowance for the perplexities and entanglements of human things; we shall observe that persons of strong mind and will brush away our scruples; we shall consider that not he who has most, but he who has fewest scruples approaches most nearly the true Christian. The man whom we emphatically call 'honest', 'able', 'upright', who is a religious as well as a sensible man, seems to have no room for them; from which we are led to infer that such scruples are seldom in the nature of things themselves, but arise out of some peculiarity or eccentricity in those who indulge them. That they are often akin to madness, is an observation not without instruction even to those whom God has blest with the full use of reason.

So far we arrive at a general conclusion like St. Paul's:—'Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God'; and, 'Blessed is he who condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth'. 'Have the Spirit of truth, and the truth shall make you free'; and the entanglements of words and the perplexities of action will disappear. But there is another way in which such difficulties have been resolved, which meets them in detail; viz., the practice of confession and the rules of casuistry, which are the guides of the confessor. When the spirit is disordered within us, it may be urged that we ought to go out of ourselves, and confess our sins one to another. But he who leads, and he who is led, alike require some rules for the examination of conscience, to quicken or moderate the sense of sin, to assist experience, to show men to themselves as they really are, neither better nor worse. Hence the necessity for casuistry.

It is remarkable, that what is in idea so excellent that it may be almost described in St. Paul's language as 'holy, just, and good', should have become a by-

word among mankind for hypocrisy and dishonesty. In popular estimation, no one is supposed to resort to casuistry, but with the view of evading a duty. The moral instincts of the world have risen up and condemned it. It is fairly put down by the universal voice, and shut up in the darkness of the tomes of the casuists. A kind of rude justice has been done upon the system, as in most cases of popular indignation, probably with some degree of injustice to the individuals who were its authors. Yet, hated as casuistry has deservedly been, it is fair also to admit that it has an element of truth which was the source of its influence. This element of truth is the acknowledgement of the difficulties which arise in the relations of a professing Christian world to the Church and to Christianity. How, without lowering the Gospel, to place it on a level with daily life is a hard question. It will be proper for us to consider the system from both sides—in its origin and in its perversion. Why it existed, and why it has failed, furnish a lesson in the history of the human mind of great interest and importance.

The unseen power by which the systems of the casuists were brought into being, was the necessity of the Roman Catholic Church. Like the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, they formed a link between the present and the past. At the time of the Reformation the doctrines of the ancient, no less than of the Reformed, faith awakened into life. But they required to be put in a new form, to reconcile them to the moral sense of mankind. Luther ended the work of self-examination by casting all his sins on Christ. But the casuists could not thus meet the awakening of men's consciences and the fearful looking for of judgement. They had to deal with an altered world, in which nevertheless the spectres of

the past, purgatory, penance, mortal sin, were again rising up; hallowed as they were by authority and antiquity they could not be cast aside; the preacher of the Counter-reformation could only explain them away. If he had placed distinctly before men's eyes, that for some one act of immorality or dishonesty they were in a state of mortal sin, the heart true to itself would have recoiled from such a doctrine, and the connexion between the Church and the world would have been for ever severed. And yet the doctrine was a part of ecclesiastical tradition; it could not be held, it could not be given up. The Jesuits escaped the dilemma by holding and evading it.

So far it would not be untrue to say that casuistry had originated in an effort to reconcile the Roman Catholic faith with nature and experience. The Roman system was, if strictly carried out, horrible and impossible; a doctrine not, as it has been sometimes described, of salvation made easy, but of universal condemnation. From these fearful conclusions of logic the subtlety of the human intellect was now to save it. The analogy of law, as worked out by jurists and canonists, supplied the means. What was repugnant to human justice could not be agreeable to Divine. The scholastic philosophy, which had begun to die out and fade away before the light of classical learning, was to revive in a new form, no longer hovering between heaven and earth, out of the reach of experience, yet below the region of spiritual truth, but, as it seemed, firmly based in the life and actions of mankind. It was the same sort of wisdom which defined the numbers and order of the celestial hierarchy, which was now to be adapted to the infinite modifications of which the actions of men are capable.

It is obvious that there are endless points of view



in which the simplest duties may be regarded. Common sense says—‘A man is to be judged by his acts’, ‘there can be no mistake about a lie’, and so on. The casuists proceed by a different road. Fixing the mind, not on the simplicity, but on the intricacy of human action, they study every point of view, and introduce every conceivable distinction. A first most obvious distinction is that of the intention and the act: ought the one to be separated from the other? The law itself seems to teach that this may hardly be; rather the intention is held to be that which gives form and colour to the act. Then the act by itself is nothing, and the intention by itself almost innocent. As we play between the two different points of view, the act and the intention together evanesce. But, secondly, as we consider the intention, must we not also consider the circumstances of the agent? For plainly a being deprived of free will cannot be responsible for his actions. Place the murderer in thought under the conditions of a necessary agent, and his actions are innocent; or under an imperfect necessity, and he loses half his guilt. Or suppose a man ignorant, or partly ignorant, of what is the teaching of the Church, or the law of the land,—here another abstract point of view arises, leading us out of the region of common sense to difficult and equitable considerations, which may be determined fairly, but which we have the greatest motive to decide in favour of ourselves. Or again, try to conceive an act without reference to its consequences, or in reference to some single consequence, without regarding it as a violation of morality or of nature, or in reference solely to the individual conscience. Or imagine the will half consenting to, half withdrawing from its act; or acting by another, or in obedience to another, or with some good object,

or under the influence of some imperfect obligation, or of opposite obligations. Even conscience itself may be at last played off against the plainest truths.

By the aid of such distinctions the simplest principles of morality multiply to infinity. An instrument has been introduced of such subtlety and elasticity that it can accommodate the canons of the Church to any consciences, to any state of the world. Sin need no longer be confined to the dreadful distinction of mortal and venial sin; it has lost its infinite and mysterious character; it has become a thing of degrees, to be aggravated or mitigated in idea, according to the expediency of the case or the pliability of the confessor. It seems difficult to perpetrate a perfect sin. No man need die of despair; in some page of the writings of the casuists will be found a difference suited to his case. And this without in any degree interfering with a single doctrine of the Church, or withdrawing one of its anathemas against heresy.

The system of casuistry, destined to work such great results, in reconciling the Church to the world and to human nature, like a torn web needing to be knit together, may be regarded as a science or profession. It is a classification of human actions, made in one sense without any reference to practice. For nothing was further from the mind of the casuist than to inquire whether a particular distinction would have a good or bad effect, was liable to perversion or not. His object was only to make such distinctions as the human mind was capable of perceiving and acknowledging. As to the physiologist objects in themselves loathsome and disgusting may be of the deepest interest, so to the casuist the foulest and most loathsome vices of mankind are not matters of abhorrence, but of science, to be arranged

and classified, just like any other varieties of human action. It is true that the study of the teacher was not supposed to be also open to the penitent. But it inevitably followed that the spirit of the teacher communicated itself to the taught. He could impart no high or exalted idea of morality or religion, who was measuring it out by inches, not deepening men's idea of sin, but attenuating it; 'mincing into nonsense' the first principles of right and wrong.

The science was further complicated by the 'doctrine of probability', which consisted in making anything approved or approvable that was confirmed by authority; even, as was said by some, of a single casuist. That could not be very wrong which a wise and good man had once thought to be right,—a better than ourselves perhaps, surveying the circumstances calmly and impartially. Who would wish that the rule of his daily life should go beyond that of a saint and doctor of the Church? Who would require such a rule to be observed by another? Who would refuse another such an escape out of the labyrinth of human difficulties and perplexities? As in all the Jesuit distinctions, there was a kind of reasonableness in the theory of this; it did but go on the principle of cutting short scruples by the rule of common sense.

And yet, what a door was here opened for the dishonesty of mankind! The science itself had dissected moral action until nothing of life or meaning remained in it. It had thrown aside, at the same time, the natural restraint which the moral sense itself exercises in determining such questions. And now for the application of this system, so difficult and complicated in itself, so incapable of receiving any check from the opinions of mankind,



the authority not of the Church, but of individuals, was to be added as a new lever to overthrow the last remains of natural religion and morality.

The marvels of this science are not yet ended. For the same changes admit of being rung upon speech as well as upon action, until truth and falsehood become alike impossible. Language itself dissolves before the decomposing power; oaths, like actions, vanish into air when separated from the intention of the speaker; the shield of custom protects falsehood. It would be a curious though needless task to follow the subject into further details. He who has read one page of the casuists has read all. There is nothing that is not right in some particular point of view,—nothing that is not true under some previous supposition.

Such a system may be left to refute itself. Those who have strayed so far away from truth and virtue are self-condemned. Yet it is not without interest to trace by what false lights of philosophy or religion good men, revolting themselves at the commission of evil, were led step by step to the unnatural result. We should expect to find that such a result originated not in any settled determination to corrupt the morals of mankind, but in an intellectual error; and it is suggestive of strange thoughts respecting our moral nature, that an intellectual error should have had the power to produce such consequences. Such appears to have been the fact. The conception of moral action on which the system depends, is as erroneous and imperfect as that of the scholastic philosophy respecting the nature of ideas. The immediate reduction of the error to practice through the agency of an order made the evil greater than that of other intellectual errors on moral and religious subjects, which, springing up in the brain of an

individual, are often corrected and purified in the course of nature before they find their way into the common mind.

1. Casuistry ignores the difference between thought and action. Actions are necessarily external. The spoken word constitutes the lie; the outward performance the crime. The Highest Wisdom, it is true, has identified the two: 'He that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.' But this is not the rule by which we are to judge our past actions, but to guard our future ones. He who has thoughts of lust or passion is not innocent in the sight of God, and is liable to be carried on to perform the act on which he suffers himself to dwell. And, in looking forward, he will do well to remember this caution of Christ: but in looking backward, in thinking of others, in endeavouring to estimate the actual amount of guilt or trespass, if he begins by placing thought on the level of action, he will end by placing action on the level of thought. It would be a monstrous state of mind in which we regarded mere imagination of evil as the same with action; hatred as the same with murder; thoughts of impurity as the same with adultery. It is not so that we must learn Christ. Actions are one thing and thoughts another in the eye of conscience, no less than of the law of the land; of God as well as man. However important it may be to remember that the all-seeing eye of God tries the reins, it is no less important to remember also that morality consists in definite acts, capable of being seen and judged of by our fellow creatures, impossible to escape ourselves.

2. What may be termed the frame of casuistry was supplied by law, while the spirit is that of the scholastic philosophy. Neither afforded any general

principle which might correct extravagancies in detail, or banish subtleties, or negative remote and unsafe inferences. But the application of the analogy of law to subjects of morality and religion was itself a figment which, at every step, led deeper into error. The object was to realize and define, in every possible stage, acts which did not admit of legal definition, either because they were not external, but only thoughts or suggestions of the mind, or because the external part of the action was not allowed to be regarded separately from the motives of the agent. The motive or intention which law takes no account of except as indicating the nature of the act, becomes the principal subject of the casuist's art. Casuistry may be said to begin where law ends. It goes where law refuses to follow with legal rules and distinctions into the domain of morality. It weighs in the balance of precedent and authority the impalpable acts of a spiritual being. Law is a real science which has its roots in history, which grasps fact; seeking, in idea, to rest justice on truth only, and to reconcile the rights of individuals with the well-being of the whole. But casuistry is but the ghost or ape of a science; it has no history and no facts corresponding to it; it came into the world by the ingenuity of man; its object is to produce an artificial disposition of human affairs, at which nature rebels.

3. The distinctions of the casuist are far from equalling the subtlety of human life, or the diversity of its conditions. It is quite true that actions the same in name are, in the scale of right and wrong, as different as can be imagined; varying with the age, temperament, education, circumstances of each individual. The casuist is not in fault for maintaining this difference, but for supposing that he can classify



or distinguish them so as to give any conception of their innumerable shades and gradations. All his folios are but the weary effort to abstract or make a brief of the individuality of man. The very actions which he classifies change their meaning as he writes them down, like the words of a sentence torn away from their context. He is ever idealizing and creating distinctions, splitting straws, dividing hairs; yet any one who reflects on himself will idealize and distinguish further still, and think of his whole life in all its circumstances, with its sequence of thoughts and motives, and, withal, many excuses. But no one can extend this sort of idealism beyond himself; no insight of the confessor can make him clairvoyant of the penitent's soul. Know ourselves we sometimes truly may, but we cannot know others, and no other can know us. No other can know or understand us in the same wonderful or mysterious way; no other can be conscious of the spirit in which we have lived; no other can see us as a whole or get within. God has placed a veil of flesh between ourselves and other men, to screen the nakedness of our soul. Into the secret chamber He does not require that we should admit any other judge or counsellor but himself. Two eyes only are upon us,—the eye of our own soul—the eye of God, and the one is the light of the other. That is the true light, on the which if a man look he will have a knowledge of himself, different in kind from that which the confessor extracts from the books of the casuists.

4. There are many cases in which our first thoughts, or, to speak more correctly, our instinctive perceptions, are true and right; in which it is not too much to say, that he who deliberates is lost. The very act of turning to a book, or referring to another, enfeebles our power of action. Works of art are produced we know not how, by some simulta-

neous movement of hand and thought, which seem to lend to each other force and meaning. So in moral action, the true view does not separate the intention from the act, or the act from the circumstances which surround it, but regards them as one and absolutely indivisible. In the performance of the act and in the judgement of it, the will and the execution, the hand and the thought are to be considered as one. Those who act most energetically, who in difficult circumstances judge the most truly, do not separately pass in review the rules, and principles, and counter principles of action, but grasp them at once, in a single instant. Those who act most truthfully, honestly, firmly, manfully, consistently, take least time to deliberate. Such should be the attitude of our minds in all questions of right and wrong, truth and falsehood: we may not inquire, but act.

5. Casuistry not only renders us independent of our own convictions, it renders us independent also of the opinion of mankind in general. It puts the confessor in the place of ourselves, and in the place of the world. By making the actions of men matters of science, it cuts away the supports and safeguards which public opinion gives to morality; the confessor in the silence of the closet easily introduces principles from which the common sense or conscience of mankind would have shrunk back. Especially in matters of truth and falsehood, in the nice sense of honour shown in the unwillingness to get others within our power, his standard will probably fall short of that of the world at large. Public opinion, it is true, drives men's vices inwards; it teaches them to conceal their faults from others, and if possible from themselves, and this very concealment may sink them in despair, or cover them with self-deceit. And the soul—whose 'house is its castle'—has an enemy within, the strength of which may be often increased

by communications from without. Yet the good of this privacy is on the whole greater than the evil. Not only is the outward aspect of society more decorous, and the confidence between man and man less liable to be impaired; the mere fact of men's sins being known to themselves and God only, and the support afforded even by the undeserved opinion of their fellows, are of themselves great helps to a moral and religious life. Many a one by being thought better than he was has become better; by being thought as bad or worse has become worse. To communicate our sins to those who have no claim to know them is of itself a diminution of our moral strength. It throws upon others what we ought to do for ourselves; it leads us to seek in the sympathy of others a strength which no sympathy can give. It is a greater trust than is right for us commonly to repose in our fellow-creatures; it places us in their power; it may make us their tools.

To conclude, the errors and evils of casuistry may be summed up as follows:—It makes that abstract which is concrete, scientific which is contingent, artificial which is natural, positive which is moral, theoretical which is intuitive and immediate. It puts the parts in the place of the whole, exceptions in the place of rules, system in the place of experience, dependence in the place of responsibility, reflection in the place of conscience. It lowers the heavenly to the earthly, the principles of men to their practice, the tone of the preacher to the standard of ordinary life. It sends us to another for that which can only be found in ourselves. It leaves the highway of public opinion to wander in the labyrinths of an imaginary science; the light of the world for the darkness of the closet. It is to human nature what anatomy is to our bodily frame; instead of a moral and spiritual being, preserving only 'a body of death'.



# ESSAY ON NATURAL RELIGION

## § 1.

THE revelation of righteousness by faith in the Epistle to the Romans is relative to a prior condemnation of Jew and Gentile, who are alike convicted of sin. If the world had not been sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, there would have been no need of the light. And yet this very darkness is a sort of contradiction, for it is the darkness of the soul, which, nevertheless, sees itself and God. Such 'darkness visible' St. Paul had felt in himself, and, passing from the individual to the world, he lifts up the veil partially, and lets the light of God's wrath shine upon the corruption of man. What he himself in the searchings of his own spirit had become conscious of was 'written in large letters' on the scene around. To all Israelites at least, the law stood in the same relation as it had once done to himself; it placed them in a state of reprobation. Without law 'they had not had sin', and now, the only way to do away with sin is to do away the law itself.

But, if 'sin is not imputed where there is no law', it might seem as though the heathen could not be brought within the sphere of the same condemnation. Could we suppose men to be like animals, 'nourishing a blind life within the brain', 'the seed that is not quickened except it die' would have no existence in them. Common sense tells us that all evil implies a knowledge of good, and that no man can be responsible for the worship of a false God who has

no means of approach to the true. But this was not altogether the case of the Gentile; 'without the law sin was in the world'; as the Jew had the law, so the Gentile had the witness of God in creation. Nature was the Gentile's law, witnessing against his immoral and degraded state, leading him upward through the visible things to the unseen power of God. He knew God, as the Apostle four times repeats, and magnified Him not as God; so that he was without excuse, not only for his idolatry, but because he worshipped idols in the presence of God himself.

Such is the train of thought which we perceive to be working in the Apostle's mind, and which leads him, in accordance with the general scope of the Epistle to the Romans, to speak of natural religion. In two passages in the Acts he dwells on the same subject. It was one that found a ready response in the age to which St. Paul preached. Reflections of a similar kind were not uncommon among the heathen themselves. If at any time in the history of mankind natural religion can be said to have had a real and independent existence, it was in the twilight of heathenism and Christianity. 'Seeking after God, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him', is a touching description of the efforts of philosophy in its later period. That there were principles in Nature higher and purer than the creations of mythology was a reflection made by those who would have deemed 'the cross of Christ foolishness', who 'mocked at the resurrection of the dead'. The Olympic heaven was no longer the air which men breathed, or the sky over their heads. The better mind of the world was turning from 'dumb idols'. Ideas about God and man were taking the place of the old heathen rites. Religions, like nations, met and mingled. East and West were

learning of each other, giving and receiving spiritual and political elements; the objects of Gentile worship fading into a more distant and universal God; the Jew also travelling in thought into regions which his fathers knew not, and beginning to form just conceptions of the earth and its inhabitants.

While we remain within the circle of Scripture language, or think of St. Paul as speaking only to the men of his own age in words that were striking and appropriate to them, there is no difficulty in understanding his meaning. The Old Testament denounced idolatry as hateful to God. It was away from Him, out of His sight; except where it touched the fortunes of the Jewish people, hardly within the range either of His judgements or of His mercies. No Israelite, in the elder days of Jewish history, supposed the tribes round about, or the individuals who composed them, to be equally with himself the objects of God's care. The Apostle brings the heathen back before the judgement seat of God. He sees them sinking into the condition of the old Canaanitish nations. He regards this corruption of Nature as a consequence of their idolatry. They knew, or might have known, God, for creation witnesses of Him. This is the hinge of the Apostle's argument: 'If they had not known God they had not had sin'; but now they know Him, and sin in the light of knowledge. Without this consciousness of sin there would be no condemnation of the heathen, and therefore no need of justification for him,—no parallelism or coherence between the previous states of Jew and Gentile, or between the two parts of the scheme of redemption.

But here philosophy, bringing into contrast the Scriptural view of things and the merely historical or human one, asks the question, 'How far was it



possible for the heathen to have seen God in Nature?' Could a man anticipate the true religion any more than he could anticipate discoveries in science or in art? Could he pierce the clouds of mythology, or lay aside language as it were a garment? Three or four in different ages, who have been the heralds of great religious revolutions, may have risen above their natural state under the influence of some divine impulse. But men in general do as others do; single persons in India or China do not dislocate themselves from the customs, traditions, prejudices, rites, in which they have been brought up. The mind of a nation has its own structure, which receives and also idealizes in various degrees the forms of outward Nature. Religions, like languages, conform to this mental structure; they are prior to the thoughts of individuals; no one is responsible for them. Homer is not to blame for his conception of the Grecian gods; it is natural and adequate to his age. For no one in primitive times could disengage himself from that world of sense which grew to him and enveloped him; we might as well imagine that he could invent a new language, or change the form which he inherited from his race into some other type of humanity.

The question here raised is one of the most important, as it is perhaps one that has been least considered, out of the many questions in which reason and faith, historical fact and religious belief, come into real or apparent conflict with each other. Volumes have been written on the connexion of geology with the Mosaic account of the creation,—a question which is on the outskirts of the great difficulty,—a sort of advanced post, at which theologians go out to meet the enemy. But we cannot refuse seriously to consider the other difficulty,

which affects us much more nearly, and in the present day almost forces itself upon us, as the spirit of the ancient religions is more understood, and the forms of religion still existing among men become better known.

It sometimes seems as if we lived in two, or rather many distinct worlds,—the world of faith and the world of experience,—the world of sacred and the world of profane history. Between them there is a gulf; it is not easy to pass from one to the other. They have a different set of words and ideas, which it would be bad taste to intermingle; and of how much is this significant? They present themselves to us at different times, and call up a different train of associations. When reading Scripture we think only of the heavens ‘which are made by the word of God’, of ‘the winds and waves obeying his will’, of the accomplishment of events in history by the interposition of His hand. But in the study of ethnology or geology, in the records of our own or past times, a curtain drops over the Divine presence; human motives take the place of spiritual agencies; effects are not without causes; interruptions of Nature repose in the idea of law. Race, climate, physical influences, states of the human intellect and of society, are among the chief subjects of ordinary history; in the Bible there is no allusion to them; to the inspired writer they have no existence. Were men different, then, in early ages, or does the sacred narrative show them to us under a different point of view? The being of whom Scripture gives one account, philosophy another,—who has a share in Nature and a place in history, who partakes also of a hidden life, and is the subject of an unseen power,—is he not the same? This is the difficulty of our times, which presses upon us

more and more, both in speculation and practice, as different classes of ideas come into comparison with each other. The day has passed in which we could look upon man in one aspect only, without interruption or confusion from any other. And Scripture, which uses the language and ideas of the age in which it was written, is inevitably at variance with the new modes of speech, as well as with the real discoveries of later knowledge.

Yet the Scriptures lead the way in subjecting the purely supernatural and spiritual view of human things to the laws of experience. The revocation in Ezekiel of the 'old proverb in the house of Israel', is the assertion of a moral principle, and a return to fact and Nature. The words of our Saviour,—'Think ye that those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were sinners above all the men who dwelt in Jerusalem?' and the parallel passage respecting the one born blind,—'Neither this man did sin, nor his parents', are an enlargement of the religious belief of the time in accordance with experience. When it is said that faith is not to look for wonders; or 'the kingdom of God cometh not with observation', and 'neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead', here, too, is an elevation of the order of Nature over the miraculous and uncommon. The preference of charity to extraordinary gifts is another instance, in which the spirit of Christ speaks by the lips of Paul, of a like tendency. And St. Paul himself, in recognizing a world without the Jewish, as responsible to God, and subject to His laws, is but carrying out, according to the knowledge of his age, the same principle which a wider experience of the world and of antiquity compels us to extend yet further to all time and to all mankind.

It has been asked: 'How far, in forming a moral



estimate of an individual, are we to consider his actions simply as good or evil; or how far are we to include in our estimate education, country, rank in life, physical constitution, and so forth?' Morality is rightly jealous of our resolving evil into the influence of circumstances: it will no more listen to the plea of temptation as the excuse for vice, than the law will hear of the same plea in mitigation of the penalty for crime. It requires that we should place ourselves within certain conditions before we pass judgement. Yet we cannot deny a higher point of view also,—of 'him that judged not as a man judgeth', in which we fear to follow only because of the limitation of our faculties. And in the case of a murderer or other great criminal, if we were suddenly made aware, when dwelling on the enormity of his crime, that he had been educated in vice and misery, that his act had not been unprovoked, perhaps that his physical constitution was such as made it nearly impossible for him to resist the provocation which was offered to him, the knowledge of these and similar circumstances would alter our estimate of the complexion of his guilt. We might think him guilty, but we should also think him unfortunate. Stern necessity might still require that the law should take its course, but we should feel pity as well as anger. We should view his conduct in a larger and more comprehensive way, and acknowledge that, had we been placed in the same circumstances, we might have been guilty of the same act.

Now the difference between these two views of morality is analogous to the difference between the way in which St. Paul regards the heathen religions, and the way in which we ourselves regard them, in proportion as we become better acquainted with their true nature. St. Paul conceives idolatry

separate from all the circumstances of time, of country, of physical or mental states by which it is accompanied, and in which it may be almost said to consist. He implies a deliberate knowledge of the good, and choice of the evil. He supposes each individual to contrast the truth of God with the error of false religions, and deliberately to reject God. He conceives all mankind, 'creatures as they are one of another', and

‘Moving all together if they move at all’,

to be suddenly freed from the bond of nationality, from the customs and habits of thought of ages. The moral life which is proper to the individual, he breathes into the world collectively. Speaking not of the agents and their circumstances, but of their acts, and seeing these reflected in what may be termed in a figure the conscience, not of an individual but of mankind in general, he passes on all men everywhere the sentence of condemnation. We can hardly venture to say what would have been his judgement on the great names of Greek and Roman history, had he familiarly known them. He might have felt as we feel, that there is a certain impropriety in attempting to determine, with a Jesuit writer, or even in the spirit of love and admiration which the great Italian poet shows for them, the places of the philosophers and heroes of antiquity in the world to come. More in his own spirit, he would have spoken of them as a part of ‘the mystery which was not then revealed as it now is’. But neither can we imagine how he could have become familiar with them at all without ceasing to be St. Paul.

Acquainted as we are with Greek and Roman

literature from within, lovers of its old heroic story, it is impossible for us to regard the religions of the heathen world in the single point of view which they presented to the first believers. It would be a vain attempt to try and divest ourselves of the feelings towards the great names of Greek and Roman history which a classical education has implanted in us; as little can we think of the deities of the heathen mythology in the spirit of a Christian of the first two centuries. Looking back from the vantage ground of ages, we see more clearly the proportions of heathenism and Christianity, as of other great forms or events of history, than was possible for contemporaries. Ancient authors are like the inhabitants of a valley who know nothing of the countries beyond: they have a narrow idea either of their own or other times; many notions are entertained by them respecting the past history of mankind which a wider prospect would have dispelled. The horizon of the sacred writers too is limited; they do not embrace the historical or other aspects of the state of man to which modern reflection has given rise; they are in the valley still, though with the 'light of the world' above. The Apostle sees the Athenians from Mars' Hill 'wholly given to idolatory': to us, the same scene would have revealed wonders of art and beauty, the loss of which the civilized nations of Europe still seem with a degree of seriousness to lament. He thinks of the heathen religions in the spirit of one of the old prophets; to us they are subjects of philosophy also. He makes no distinction between their origin and their decline, the dreams of the childhood of the human race and the fierce and brutal lusts with which they afterwards became polluted; we note many differences between Homer and the corruption



of later Greek life, between the rustic simplicity of the old Roman religion and the impurities of the age of Clodius or Tiberius. More and more, as they become better known to us, the original forms of all religions are seen to fall under the category of nature and less under that of mind, or free will. There is nothing to which they are so much akin as language, of which they are a sort of after-growth, —in their fantastic creations the play or sport of the same faculty of speech; they seem to be also based on a spiritual affection, which is characteristic of man equally with the social ones. Religions, like languages, are inherent in all men everywhere, having a close sympathy or connexion with political and family life. It would be a shallow and imaginary explanation of them that they are corruptions of some primæval revelation, or impostures framed by the persuasive arts of magicians or priests. There are many other respects in which our first impressions respecting the heathen world are changed by study and experience. There was more of true greatness in the conceptions of heathen legislators and philosophers than we readily admit, and more of nobility and disinterestedness in their character. The founders of the Eastern religions especially, although indistinctly seen by us, appear to be raised above the ordinary level of mortality. The laws of our own country are an inheritance partly bequeathed to us by a heathen nation; many of our philosophical and most of our political ideas are derived from a like source. What shall we say to these things? Are we not undergoing, on a wider scale and in a new way, the same change which the Fathers of Alexandria underwent, when they became aware that heathenism was not wholly evil, and that there was as much in Plato and Aristotle which

was in harmony with the Gospel as of what was antagonistic to it.

Among the many causes at present in existence which will influence 'the Church of the future', none is likely to have greater power than our increasing knowledge of the religions of mankind. The study of them is the first step in the philosophical study of revelation itself. For Christianity or the Mosaic religion, standing alone, is hardly a subject for scientific inquiry: only when compared with other forms of faith do we perceive its true place in history, or its true relation to human nature. The glory of Christianity is not to be as unlike other religions as possible, but to be their perfection and fulfilment. Those religions are so many steps in the education of the human race. One above another, they rise or grow side by side, each nation, in many ages, contributing some partial ray of a divine light, some element of morality, some principle of social life, to the common stock of mankind. The thoughts of men, like the productions of Nature, do not endlessly diversify; they work themselves out in a few simple forms. In the fulness of time, philosophy appears, shaking off, yet partly retaining, the nationality and particularity of its heathen origin. Its top 'reaches to heaven', but it has no root in the common life of man. At last, the crown of all, the chief corner-stone of the building, when the impressions of Nature and the reflections of the mind upon itself have been exhausted, Christianity arises in the world, seeming to stand in the same relation to the inferior religions that man does to the inferior animals.

When, instead of painting harsh contrasts between Christianity and other religions, we rather draw them together as nearly as truth will allow, many thoughts

come into our minds about their relation to each other which are of great speculative interest as well as of practical importance. The joyful words of the Apostle: 'Is he the God of the Jews only, is he not also of the Gentiles?' have a new meaning for us. And this new application the Apostle himself may be regarded as having taught us, where he says: 'When the Gentiles which know not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these not having the law are a law unto themselves'. There have been many schoolmasters to bring men to Christ, and not the law of Moses only. Ecclesiastical history enlarges its borders to take in the preparations for the Gospel, the anticipations of it, the parallels with it; collecting the scattered gleams of truth which may have revealed themselves even to single individuals in remote ages and countries. We are no longer interested in making out a case against the heathen religions in the spirit of party,—the superiority of Christianity will appear sufficiently without that—we rather rejoice that, at sundry times and in divers manners, by ways more or less akin to the methods of human knowledge, 'God spake in time past to the fathers', and that in the darkest ages, amid the most fanciful aberrations of mythology, He left not Himself wholly without a witness between good and evil, in the natural affections of mankind.

Some facts also begin to appear, which have hitherto been unknown or concealed. They are of two kinds, relating partly to the origin or development of the Jewish or Christian religion; partly also independent of them, yet affording remarkable parallels both to their outward form and to their inner life. Christianity is seen to have partaken much more of the better mind of the Gentile world than



the study of Scripture only would have led us to conjecture: it has received, too, many of its doctrinal terms from the language of philosophy. The Jewish religion is proved to have incorporated with itself some elements which were not of Jewish origin; and the Jewish history begins to be explained by the analogy of other nations. The most striking fact of the second kind is found in a part of the world which Christianity can be scarcely said to have touched, and is of a date some centuries anterior to it. That there is a faith<sup>1</sup> which has a greater number of worshippers than all sects of Christians put together, which originated in a reformation of society, tyrannized over by tradition, spoiled by philosophy, torn asunder by caste,—which might be described, in the words of Scripture, as a ‘preaching of the Gospel to the poor’; that this faith, besides its more general resemblance to Christianity, has its incarnation, its monks, its saints, its hierarchy, its canonical books, its miracles, its councils, the whole system being ‘full blown’ before the Christian era; that the founder of this religion descended from a throne to teach the lesson of equality among men—(‘there is no distinction of’ Chinese or Hindoo, Brahmin or Sudra, such at least was the indirect consequence of his doctrine)—that, himself contented with nothing, he preached to his followers the virtues of poverty, self-denial, chastity, temperance, and that once, at least, he is described as ‘taking upon himself the sins of mankind’ :—these are facts which, when once known, are not easily forgotten; they seem to open an undiscovered world to us, and to cast a new light on Christianity itself. And it ‘harrows us with fear and wonder’, to learn that this vast system, numerically the most universal or catholic of all religions,

<sup>1</sup> Buddhism.

and, in many of its leading features, most like Christianity, is based, not on the hope of eternal life, but of complete annihilation.

The Greek world presents another parallel with the Gospel, which is also independent of it; less striking, yet coming nearer home, and sometimes overlooked because it is general and obvious. That the political virtues of courage, patriotism, and the like, have been received by Christian nations from a classical source is commonly admitted. Let us ask now the question, Whence is the love of knowledge? who first taught men that the pursuit of truth was a religious duty? Doubtless the words of one greater than Socrates come into our minds: 'For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that they might know the truth'. But the truth here spoken of is of another and more mysterious kind; not truth in the logical or speculative sense of the word, nor even in its ordinary use. The earnest inquiry after the nature of things, the devotion of a life to such an inquiry, the forsaking all other good in the hope of acquiring some fragment of true knowledge,—this is an instance of human virtue not to be found among the Jews, but among the Greeks. It is a phenomenon of religion, as well as of philosophy, that among the Greeks too there should have been those who, like the Jewish prophets, stood out from the world around them, who taught a lesson, like them, too exalted for the practice of mankind in general; who anticipated out of the order of nature the knowledge of future ages; whose very chance words and misunderstood modes of speech have moulded the minds of men in remote times and countries. And that these teachers of mankind, 'as they were finishing their course' in the decline of Paganism, like Jewish prophets, though unacquainted

with Christianity, should have become almost Christian, preaching the truths which we sometimes hold to be 'foolishness to the Greek', as when Epictetus spoke of humility, or Seneca told of a God who had made of one blood all nations of the earth,—is a sad and touching fact.

But it is not only the better mind of heathenism in East or West that affords parallels with the Christian religion: the corruptions of Christianity, its debasement by secular influences, its temporary decay at particular times or places, receive many illustrations from similar phenomena in ancient times and heathen countries. The manner in which the Old Testament has taken the place of the New; the tendency to absorb the individual life in the outward church; the personification of the principle of separation from the world in monastic orders; the accumulation of wealth with the profession of poverty; the spiritualism, or childlike faith, of one age, and the rationalism or formalism of another; many of the minute controversial disputes which exist between Christians respecting doctrines both of natural and revealed religion;—all these errors or corruptions of Christianity admit of being compared with similar appearances either in Buddhism or Mahomedanism. Is not the half-believing half-sceptical attitude in which Socrates and others stood to the 'orthodox' pagan faith very similar to that in which philosophers, and in some countries educated men generally, have stood to established forms of Christianity? Is it only in Christian times that men have sought to consecrate art in the service of religion? Did not Paganism do so far more completely? or was it Plato only to whom moral ideas represented themselves in sensual forms? Has not the whole vocabulary of art, in modern times, become confused



with that of morality? The modern historian of Greece and Rome draws our attention to other religious features in the ancient world, which are not without their counterpart in the modern,—‘old friends with new faces’,—which a few words are enough to suggest. The aristocratic character of Paganism, the influence which it exerted over women, its galvanic efforts to restore the past, the ridicule with which the sceptic assails its errors, and the manner in which the antiquarians Pausanias and Dionysius contemptuously reply; also the imperfect attempts at reconcilment of old and new, found in such writers as Plutarch, and the obscure sense of the real connexion of the Pagan worship with political and social life, the popularity of its temporary hierophants; its panics, wonders, oracles, mysteries,—these features make us aware that however unlike the true life of Christianity may have been even to the better mind of heathenism, the corruptions and weaknesses of Christianity have never been without a parallel under the sun.

Those religions which possess sacred books furnish some other curious, though exaggerated, likenesses of the use which was been sometimes made of the Jewish or Christian Scriptures. No believer in organic or verbal inspiration has applied more high-sounding titles to the Bible than the Brahmin or Mussulman to the Koran or the Vedas. They have been loaded with commentaries—buried under the accumulations of tradition; no care has been thought too great of their words and letters, while the original meaning has been lost, and even the language in which they were written ceased to be understood. Every method of interpretation has been practised upon them; logic and mysticism have elicited every possible sense; the aid of miracles has been called in to resolve diffi-

culties and reconcile contradictions. And still, notwithstanding the perverseness with which they are interpreted, these half-understood books exercise a mighty spell; single verses, misapplied words, disputed texts, have affected the social and political state of millions of mankind during a thousand or many thousand years. Even without reference to their contents, the mere name of these books has been a power in the Eastern world. Facts like these would be greatly misunderstood if they were supposed to reduce the Old and New Testament to the level of other sacred books, or Christianity to the level of other religions. But they may guard us against some forms of superstition which insensibly, almost innocently, spring up among Christians; and they reveal weaknesses of human nature, from which we can scarcely hope that our own age or country is exempt.

Let us conclude this digression by summing up the use of such inquiries; as a touchstone and witness of Christian truth; as bearing on our relations with the heathens themselves.

Christianity, in its way through the world, is ever taking up and incorporating with itself Jewish, secular, or even Gentile elements. And the use of the study of the heathen religions is just this: it teaches us to separate the externals or accidents of Christianity from its essence; its local, temporary type from its true spirit and life. These externals, which Christianity has in common with other religions of the East, may be useful, may be necessary, but they are not the truths which Christ came on earth to reveal. The fact of the possession of sacred books, and the claim which is made for them, that they are free from all error or imperfection, if admitted, would not distinguish the Christian from

the Mahomedan faith. Most of the Eastern religions, again, have had vast hierarchies and dogmatic systems; neither is this a note of divinity. Also, they are witnessed to by signs and wonders; we are compelled to go further to find the characteristics of the Gospel of Christ. As the Apostle says: 'And yet I show you a more excellent way,'—not in the Scriptures, nor in the church, nor in a system of doctrines, nor in miracles, does Christianity consist, though some of these may be its necessary accompaniments or instruments, but in the life and teaching of Christ.

The study of 'comparative theology' not only helps to distinguish the accidents from the essence of Christianity; it also affords a new kind of testimony to its truth; it shows what the world was aiming at through many cycles of human history—what the Gospel alone fulfilled. The Gentile religions, from being enemies, become witnesses of the Christian faith. They are no longer adverse positions held by the powers of evil, but outworks or buttresses, like the courts of the Temple on Mount Sion, covering the holy place. Granting that some of the doctrines and teachers of the heathen world were nearer the truth than we once supposed, such resemblances cause no alarm or uneasiness; we have no reason to fable that they are the fragments of some primeval revelation. We look forwards, not backwards; to the end, not to the beginning; not to the garden of Eden, but to the life of Christ. There is no longer any need to maintain a thesis; we have the perfect freedom and real peace which is attained by the certainty that we know all, and that nothing is kept back. Such was the position of Christianity in former ages; it was on a level with the knowledge of mankind. But in later years



unworthy fear has too often paralysed its teachers : instead of seeking to readjust its relations to the present state of history and science, they have clung in agony to the past. For the Gospel is the child of light ; it lives in the light of this world ; it has no shifts or concealments ; there is no kind of knowledge which it needs to suppress ; it allows us to see the good in all things ; it does not forbid us to observe also the evil which has incrustated upon itself. It is willing that we should look calmly and steadily at all the facts of the history of religion. It takes no offence at the remark, that it has drawn into itself the good of other religions ; that the laws and institutions of the Roman Empire have supplied the outer form, and heathen philosophy some of the inner mechanism which was necessary to its growth in the world. No violence is done to its spirit by the enumeration of the causes which have led to its success. It permits us also to note, that while it has purified the civilization of the West, there are soils of earth on which it seems hardly capable of living without becoming corrupt or degenerate. Such knowledge is innocent and a 'creature of God'. And considering how much of the bitterness of Christians against one another arises from ignorance and a false conception of the nature of religion, it is not chimerical to imagine that the historical study of religions may be a help to Christian charity. The least differences seem often to be the greatest ; the perception of the greater differences makes the lesser insignificant. Living within the sphere of Christianity, it is good for us sometimes to place ourselves without ; to turn away from 'the weak and beggarly elements' of worn-out controversies to contemplate the great phases of human existence. Looking at the religions of mankind, succeeding one

another in a wonderful order, it is hard to narrow our minds to party or sectarian views in our own age or country. Had it been known that a dispute about faith and works existed among Buddhists, would not this knowledge have modified the great question of the Reformation? Such studies have also a philosophical value as well as a Christian use. They may, perhaps, open to us a new page in the history of our own minds, as well as in the history of the human race. Mankind, in primitive times, seem at first sight very unlike ourselves: as we look upon them with sympathy and interest, a likeness begins to appear; in us too there is a piece of the primitive man; many of his wayward fancies are the caricatures of our errors or perplexities. If a clearer light is ever to be thrown either on the nature of religion or of the human mind, it will come, not from analyses of the individual or from inward experience, but from a study of the mental history of mankind, and especially of those ages in which human nature was fusile, still not yet cast in a mould, and rendered incapable of receiving new creations or impressions.

The study of the religions of the world has also a bearing on the present condition of the heathen. We cannot act upon men unless we understand them; we cannot raise or elevate their moral character unless we are able to draw from its concealment the seed of good which they already contain. It is a remarkable fact, that Christianity, springing up in the East, should have conquered the whole western world, and that in the East itself it should have scarcely extended its border, or even retained its original hold. 'Westward the course of Christianity has taken its way'; and now it seems as if the two ends of the world would no longer meet;

as if differences of degree had extended to differences of kind in human nature, and that we cannot pass from one species to another. Whichever way we look, difficulties appear such as had no existence in the first ages: either barbarism, paling in the presence of a superior race, so that it can hardly be kept alive to receive Christianity, or the mummy-like civilization of China, which seems as though it could never become instinct with a new life, or Brahminism, outlasting in its pride many conquerors of the soil, or the nobler form of Mahomedanism; the religion of the patriarchs, as it were, overliving itself, preaching to the sons of Ishmael the God of Abraham, who had not yet revealed himself as man. These great systems of religious belief have been subject to some internal changes in a shifting world: the effect produced upon them from without is as yet scarcely perceptible. The attempt to move them is like a conflict between man and nature. And in some places it seems as if the wave had receded again after its advance, and some conversions have been dearly bought, either by the violence of persecution or the corruption or accommodation of the truth. Each sect of Christians has been apt to lend itself to the illusion that the great organic differences of human nature might be bridged over, could the Gospel of Christ be preached to the heathen in that precise form in which it is received by themselves; 'if we could but land in remote countries, full armed in that particular system or way after which we in England worship the God of our Fathers'. And often the words have been repeated, sometimes in the spirit of delusion, sometimes in that of faith and love: 'Lift up your eyes, and behold the fields, that they are already white for harvest', when it was but a small corner of the field



that was beginning to whiten, a few ears only which were ready for the reapers to gather.

And yet the command remains: 'Go forth and preach the Gospel to every creature'. Nor can any blessing be conceived greater than the spread of Christianity among heathen nations, nor any calling nobler or higher to which Christians can devote themselves. Why are we unable to fulfil this command in any effectual manner? Is it that the Gospel has had barriers set to it, and that the stream no longer overflows on the surrounding territory; that we have enough of this water for ourselves, but not enough for us and them? or that the example of nominal Christians, who are bent on their own trade or interest, destroys the lesson which has been preached by the ministers of religion? Yet the lives of believers did not prevent the spread of Christianity at Corinth and Ephesus. And it is hard to suppose that the religion which is true for ourselves has lost its vital power in the world.

The truth seems to be, not that Christianity has lost its power, but that we are seeking to propagate Christianity under circumstances which, during the eighteen centuries of its existence, it has never yet encountered. Perhaps there may have been a want of zeal, or discretion, or education in the preachers; sometimes there may have been too great a desire to impress on the mind of the heathen some peculiar doctrine, instead of the more general lesson of 'righteousness, temperance, judgement to come'. But however this may be, there is no reason to believe that even if a saint or apostle could rise from the dead, he would produce by his preaching alone, without the use of other means, any wide or deep impression on India or China. To restore life to those countries is a vast and complex work, in

which many agencies have to co-operate,—political, industrial, social; and missionary efforts, though a blessed, are but a small part; and the Government is not the less Christian because it seeks to rule a heathen nation on principles of truth and justice only. Let us not measure this great work by the number of communicants or converts. Even when wholly detached from Christianity, the true spirit of Christianity may animate it. The extirpation of crime, the administration of justice, the punishment of falsehood, may be regarded, without a figure of speech, as ‘the word of the Lord’ to a weak and deceitful people. Lessons of purity and love too flow insensibly out of improvement in the relations of social life. It is the disciple of Christ, not Christ himself, who would forbid us to give these to the many, because we can only give the Gospel to a very few. For it is of the millions, not of the thousands, in India that we must first give an account. Our relations to the heathen are different from those of Christians in former ages, and our progress in their conversion slower. The success which attends our efforts may be disparagingly compared with that of Boniface or Augustine; but if we look a little closer, we shall see no reason to regret that Providence has placed in our hands other instruments for the spread of Christianity besides the zeal of heroes and martyrs. The power to convert multitudes by a look or a word has passed away; but God has given us another means of ameliorating the condition of mankind, by acting on their circumstances, which works extensively rather than intensively, and is in some respects safer and less liable to abuse. The mission is one of governments rather than of churches or individuals. And if, in carrying it out, we seem to lose sight of some of the distinctive

marks of Christianity, let us not doubt that the increase of justice and mercy, the growing sense of truth, even the progress of industry, are in themselves so many steps towards the kingdom of heaven.

In the direct preaching of the Gospel, no help can be greater than that which is gained from a knowledge of the heathen religions. The resident in heathen countries readily observes the surface of the world; he has no difficulty in learning the habits of the natives; he avoids irritating their fears or jealousies. It requires a greater effort to understand the mind of a people; to be able to rouse or calm them; to sympathize with them, and yet to rule them. But it is a higher and more commanding knowledge still to comprehend their religion, not only in its decline and corruption, but in its origin and idea,—to understand that which they misunderstand, to appeal to that which they reverence against themselves, to turn back the currents of thought and opinion which have flowed in their veins for thousands of years. Such is the kind of knowledge which St. Paul had when to the Jews he became as a Jew, that he might win some; which led him while placing the new and old in irreconcilable opposition, to bring forth the new out of the treasure-house of the old. No religion, at present existing in the world, stands in the same relation to Christianity that Judaism once did; there is no other religion which is prophetic or anticipatory of it. But neither is there any religion which does not contain some idea of truth, some notion of duty or obligation, some sense of dependence on God and brotherly love to man, some human feeling of home or country. As in the vast series of the animal creation, with its many omissions and interruptions,



the eye of the naturalist sees a kind of continuity,—some elements of the higher descending into the lower, rudiments of the lower appearing in the higher also,—so the Christian philosopher, gazing on the different races and religions of mankind, seems to see in them a spiritual continuity, not without the thought crossing him that the God who has made of one blood all the nations of the earth may yet renew in them a common life, and that our increasing knowledge of the present and past history of the world, and the progress of civilization itself, may be the means which He has provided, working not always in the way which we expect,—‘that his banished ones be not expelled from him’.

### § 2.

Natural religion, in the sense in which St. Paul appeals to its witness, is confined within narrower limits. It is a feeling rather than a philosophy; and rests not on arguments, but on impressions of God in nature. The Apostle, in the first chapter of the *Romans*, does not reason from first causes or from final causes; abstractions like these would not have been understood by him. Neither is he taking an historical survey of the religions of mankind; he touches, in a word only, on those who changed the glory of God into the ‘likeness of man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things’ (*Rom. i. 23*), as on the differences of nations, in *Acts xvii. 26*. More truly may we describe him in the language of the Psalmist, the very vacancy of which has a peculiar meaning: ‘He lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his salvation’. He wishes to inspire other men with that consciousness of God in all things which he himself feels: ‘in a dry and thirsty land where no water is’, he would

raise their minds to think of Him 'who gave them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons'; in the city of Pericles and Phidias he bids them turn from gilded statues and temples formed with hands, to the God who made of one blood all the nations of the earth, 'who is not far from every one of us'. Yet it is observable that he also begins by connecting his own thoughts with theirs, quoting 'their own poets', and taking occasion, from an inscription which he found in their streets, to declare 'the mystery which was once hidden, but now revealed'.

The appeal to the witness of God in nature has passed from the Old Testament into the New; it is one of the many points which the Epistles of St. Paul and the Psalms and Prophets have in common. 'The invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made', is another way of saying, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handywork'. Yet the conception of the Old Testament is not the same with that of the New: in the latter we seem to be more disengaged from the things of sense; the utterance of the former is more that of feeling, and less of reflection. One is the poetry of a primitive age, full of vivid immediate impressions; in the other nature is more distant,—the freshness of the first vision of earth has passed away. The Deity Himself, in the Hebrew Scriptures, has a visible form: as He appeared 'with the body of heaven in his clearness'; as He was seen by the prophet Ezekiel out of the midst of the fire and the whirlwind, 'full of eyes within and without, and the spirit of the living creature in the wheels'. But in the New Testament, 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him'. And this

difference leads to a further difference in His relation to His works. In what we term nature, the prophet beheld only the covering cherubim that veil the face of God: as He moves, earth moves to meet Him; 'He maketh the winds his angels', 'the heavens also bow before him'. His voice, as the Psalmist says, is heard in the storm: 'The Highest gives his thunder; at thy chiding, O Lord, the foundations of the round world are discovered'. The wonders of creation are not ornaments or poetical figures, strewed over the pages of the Old Testament by the hand of the artist, but the frame in which it consists. And yet in this material garb the moral and spiritual nature of God is never lost sight of: in the conflict of the elements He is the free Lord over them; at His breath—the least exertion of His power—'they come and flee away'. He is spirit, not light,—a person, not an element or principle; though creating all things by His word, and existing without reference to them, yet also, in His condescension, the God of the Jewish nation, and of individuals who serve Him. The terrible imagery in which the Psalmist delights to array His power is not inconsistent with the gentlest feelings of love and trust, such as are also expressed in the passage just now quoted: 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength'. God is in nature because He is near also to the cry of His servants. The heart of man expands in His presence; he fears to die lest he should be taken from it. There is nothing like this in any other religion in the world. No Greek or Roman ever had the consciousness of love towards his God. No other sacred books can show a passage displaying such a range of feeling as the eighteenth or twenty-ninth Psalm—so awful a conception of the majesty of God, so true and tender a sense of His righteousness and



lovingkindness. It is the same God who wields nature, who also brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt; who, even though the mother desert 'her sucking child', will not 'forget the work of his hands'.

But the God of nature in the Old Testament is not the God of storms or of battles only, but of peace and repose. Sometimes a sort of confidence fills the breast of the Psalmist, even in that land of natural convulsions: 'He hath set the round world so fast that it cannot be moved'. At other times the same peace seems to diffuse itself over the scenes of daily life: 'The hills stand round about Jerusalem, even so is the Lord round about them that fear him'. 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.' Then again the Psalmist wonders at the contrast between man and the other glories of creation: 'When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon and the stars, that thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?' Yet these 'glories' are the images also of a higher glory; Jerusalem itself is transfigured into a city in the clouds, and the tabernacle and temple become the pavilion of God on high. And the dawn of day in the prophecies, as well as in the Epistles, is the light which is to shine 'for the healing of the nations'. There are other passages in which the thought of the relation of God to nature calls forth a sort of exulting irony, and the prophet speaks of God, not so much as governing the world, as looking down upon it and taking His pastime in it: 'It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers'; or 'He measureth the waters in the hollow of His hand'; or 'He taketh up the isles as a very little thing': the

feeling of which may be compared with the more general language of St. Paul: 'We are the clay and He the potter'. The highest things on earth reach no farther than to suggest the reflection of their inferiority: 'Behold even the sun, and it shineth not; and the moon is not pure in his sight'.

It is hard to say how far such meditations belong only to particular ages, or to particular temperaments in our own. Doubtless, the influence of natural scenery differs with difference of climate, pursuits, education. 'The God of the hills is not the God of the valleys also'; that is to say, the aspirations of the human heart are roused more by the singular and uncommon, than by the quiet landscape which presents itself in our own neighbourhood. The sailor has a different sense of the vastness of the great deep and the infinity of the heaven above, from what is possible to another. Dwellers in cities, no less than the inhabitants of the desert, gaze upon the stars with different feelings from those who see the ever-varying forms of the seasons. What impression is gathered, or what lesson conveyed, seems like matter of chance or fancy. The power of these sweet influences often passes away when language comes between us and them. Yet they are not mere dreams of our own creation. He who has lost, or has failed to acquire, this interest in the beauty of the world around, is without one of the greatest of earthly blessings. The voice of God in nature calls us away from selfish cares into the free air and the light of day. There, as in a world the face of which is not marred by human passion, we seem to feel 'that the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest'.

It is impossible that our own feeling towards nature in the present day can be the same with that

of the Psalmist ; neither is that of the Psalmist the same with that of the Apostle ; while, in the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes we seem to catch the echo of a strain different from either. To us, God is not in the whirlwind nor in the storm, nor in the earthquake, but in the still small voice. Is it not for the attempt to bring God nearer to us in the works of nature than we can truly conceive Him to be, that a poet of our own age has been subject to the charge of pantheism ? God has removed himself out of our sight, that He may give us a greater idea of the immensity of His power. Perhaps it is impossible for us to have the wider and the narrower conception of God at the same time. We cannot see Him equally in the accidents of the world, when we think of Him as identified with its laws. But there is another way into His presence through our own hearts. He has given us the more circuitous path of knowledge ; He has not closed against us the door of faith. He has enabled us, not merely to gaze with the eye on the forms and colours of Nature, but in a measure also to understand its laws, to wander over space and time in the contemplation of its mechanism, and yet to return again to ‘the meanest flower that breathes’, for thoughts such as the other wonders of earth and sky are unable to impart.

It is a simpler, not a lower, lesson which we gather from the Apostle. First, he teaches that in Nature there is something to draw us from the visible to the invisible. The world to the Gentiles also had seemed full of innumerable deities ; it is really full of the presence of Him who made it. Secondly, the Apostle teaches the universality of God’s providence over the whole earth. He covered it with inhabitants, to whom He gave their times and places of



abode, 'that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him'. They are one family, 'His offspring', notwithstanding the varieties of race, language, religion. As God is one, even so man is one in a common human nature—in the universality of sin, no less than the universality of redemption. A third lesson is the connexion of immorality and idolatry. They who lower the nature of God lower the nature of man also. Greek philosophy fell short of these lessons. Often as Plato speaks of the myths and legends of the gods, he failed to perceive the immorality of a religion of sense. Still less had any Greek imagined a brotherhood of all mankind, or a dispensation of God reaching backwards and forwards over all time. Its limitation was an essential principle of Greek life; it was confined to a narrow spot of earth, and to small cities; it could not include others besides Greeks; its gods were not gods of the world, but of Greece.

Aspects of Nature in different ages have changed before the eye of man; at times fruitful of many thoughts; at other times either unheeded or fading into insignificance in comparison of the inner world. When the Apostle spoke of the visible things which 'witness of the divine power and glory', it was not the beauty of particular spots which he recalled; his eye was not satisfied with seeing the fairness of the country any more than the majesty of cities. He did not study the flittings of shadows on the hills, or even the movements of the stars in their courses. The plainest passages of the book of nature were, equally with the sublimest, the writing of a Divine hand. Neither was it upon scenes of earth that he was looking when he spoke of the 'whole creation groaning together until now'. Whatever

associations of melancholy or pity may attach to places or states of the heavens, or to the condition of the inferior animals who seem to suffer for our sakes; it is not in these that the Apostle traces the indications of a ruined world, but in the misery and distraction of the heart of man. And the prospect on which he loves to dwell is not that of the promised land, as Moses surveyed it far and wide from the top of Pisgah, but the human race itself, the great family in heaven and earth, of which Christ is the head, reunited to the God who made it, when 'there shall be neither barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all one in Christ', the Apostle himself also waiting for the fuller manifestation of the sons of God, and sometimes carrying his thoughts yet further to that mysterious hour, when 'the Son shall be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all'.

When thoughts like these fill the mind, there is little room for reflection on the world without. Even the missionary in modern times hardly cares to go out of his way to visit a picturesque country or the monuments of former ages. He is 'determined to know one thing only, Christ crucified'. Of the beauties of creation, his chief thought is that they are the work of God. He does not analyse them by rules of taste, or devise material out of them for literary discourse. The Apostle, too, in the abundance of his revelations, has an eye turned inward on another world. It is not that he is dead to Nature, but that it is out of his way; not as in the Old Testament, the veil or frame of the Divine presence, but only the background of human nature and of revelation. When speaking of the heathen, it comes readily into his thoughts; it never seems to occur to him in connexion with the work of Christ.

He does not read mysteries in the leaves of the forest, or see the image of the cross in the forms of the tree, or find miracles of design in the complex structures of animal life. His thoughts respecting the works of God are simpler, and also deeper. The child and the philosopher alike hear a witness in the first chapter of the Romans, or in the discourse of the Apostle on Mars' Hill, or at Lystra, which the mystic fancies of Neoplatonism, and the modern evidences of natural theology, fail to convey to them.

### § 3.

In the common use of language natural religion is opposed to revealed. That which men know, or seem to know, of themselves, which if the written word were to be destroyed would still remain, which existed prior to revelation, and which might be imagined to survive it, which may be described as general rather than special religion, as Christianity rationalized into morality, which speaks of God, but not of Christ,—of nature, but not of grace,—has been termed natural religion. Philosophical arguments for the being of a God are comprehended under the same term. It is also used to denote a supposed primitive or patriarchal religion, whether based on a primeval revelation or not, from which the mythologies or idolatries of the heathen world are conceived to be offshoots.

The line has been sometimes sharply drawn between natural and revealed religion; in other ages of the world, the two have been allowed to approximate, or be almost identified with each other. Natural religion has been often depressed with a view to the exaltation of revealed; the feebleness of the one seeming to involve a necessity for the other. Natural



religion has sometimes been regarded as the invention of human reason; at other times, as the decaying sense of a primeval revelation. Yet natural and revealed religion, in the sense in which it is attempted to oppose them, are contrasts rather of words than of ideas. For who can say where the one begins and the other ends? Who will determine how many elements of Scriptural truth enter into modern philosophy or the opinions of the world in general? Who can analyse how much, even in a Christian country, is really of heathen origin? Revealed religion is ever taking the form of the voice of Nature within; experience is ever modifying our application of the truths of Scripture. The ideal of Christian life is more easily distinguishable from the ideal of Greek and Roman, than the elements of opinion and belief which have come from a Christian source are from those which come from a secular or heathen one. Education itself tends to obliterate the distinction. The customs, laws, principles of a Christian nation may be regarded either as a compromise between the two, or as a harmony of them. We cannot separate the truths of Christianity from Jewish or heathen anticipations of them; nor can we say how far the common sense or morality of the present day is indirectly dependent on the Christian religion.

And if, turning away from the complexity of human life in our own age to the beginning of things, we try to conceive revelation in its purity before it came into contact with other influences, or mingled in the great tide of political and social existence, we are still unable to distinguish between natural and revealed religion. Our difficulty is like the old Aristotelian question, how to draw the line between the moral and intellectual faculties. Let us imagine a first moment at which revelation came

into the world; there must still have been some prior state which made revelation possible: in other words, revealed religion presupposes natural. The mind was not a *tabula rasa*, on which the characters of truth had to be inscribed; that is a mischievous notion, which only perplexes our knowledge of the origin of things, whether in individuals or in the race. If we say that this prior state is a Divine preparation for the giving of the Law of Moses, or the spread of Christianity, the difference becomes one of degree which admits of no sharp contrast. Revealed religion has already taken the place of natural, and natural religion extended itself into the province of revealed. Many persons who are fond of discovering traces of revelation in the religions of the Gentile world, resent the intrusion of natural elements into Scripture or Christianity. Natural religion they are willing to see identified with revealed, but not revealed with natural; all Nature may be a miracle, but miracles are not reducible to the course of Nature. But here is only a play between words which derive their meaning from contrast; the phenomena are the same, but we read them by a different light. And sometimes it may not be without advantage to lay aside the two modes of expression, and think only of that 'increasing purpose which through the ages ran'. Religious faith strikes its roots deeper into the past, and wider over the world, when it acknowledges Nature as well as Scripture.

But although the opposition of natural and revealed religion is an opposition of abstractions, to which no facts really correspond, the term natural religion may be conveniently used to describe that aspect or point of view in which religion appears when separated from Judaism or Christianity. It

will embrace all conceptions of religion or morality which are not consciously derived from the Old or New Testament. The favourite notion of a common or patriarchal religion need not be excluded. Natural religion, in this comprehensive sense, may be divided into two heads, which the ambiguity of the word nature has sometimes helped to confuse. First, (i.) the religion of nature before revelation, such as may be supposed to have existed among the patriarchs, or to exist still among primitive peoples, who have not yet been enlightened by Christianity, or debased by idolatry; such (ii.) more truly, as the religions of the Gentile world were and are. Secondly, the religion of nature in a Christian country; either the evidences of religion which are derived from a source independent of the written word, or the common sense of religion and morality, which affords a rule of life to those who are not the subjects of special Christian influences.

i. Natural religion in the first sense is an idea and not a fact. The same tendency in man which has made him look fondly on a golden age, has made him look back also to a religion of nature. Like the memory of childhood, the thought of the past has a strange power over us; imagination lends it a glory which is not its own. What can be more natural than that the shepherd, wandering over the earth beneath the wide heavens, should ascend in thought to the throne of the Invisible? There is a refreshment to the fancy in thinking of the morning of the world's day, when the sun arose pure and bright, ere the clouds of error darkened the earth. Everywhere, as a fact, the first inhabitants of earth of whom history has left a memorial are sunk in helpless ignorance. Yet there must have been a time, it is conceived, of which there are no



memorials, earlier still; when the Divine image was not yet lost, when men's wants were few and their hearts innocent, ere cities had taken the place of fields, or art of nature. The revelation of God to the first father of the human race must have spread itself in an ever-widening circle to his posterity. We pierce through one layer of superstition to another, in the hope of catching the light beyond, like children digging to find the sun in the bosom of the earth.

The origin of an error so often illustrates the truth, that it is worth while to pause for an instant and consider the source of this fallacy, which in all ages has exerted a great influence on mankind, reproducing itself in many different forms among heathen as well as Christian writers. In technical language, it might be described as the fallacy of putting what is intelligible in the place of what is true. It is easy to draw an imaginary picture of a golden or pastoral age, such as poetry has always described it. The mode of thought is habitual and familiar, the phrases which delineate it are traditional, handed on from one set of poets to another, repeated by one school of theologians to the next. It is a different task to imagine the old world as it truly was, that is, as it appears to us, dimly yet certainly, by the unmistakable indications of language and of mythology. It is hard to picture scenes of external nature unlike what we have ever beheld: but it is harder far so to lay aside ourselves as to imagine an inner world unlike our own, forms of belief, not simply absurd, but indescribable and unintelligible to us. No one, probably, who has not realized the differences of the human mind in different ages and countries, either by contact with heathen nations or the study of old language and

mythology, with the help of such a parallel as childhood offers to the infancy of the world, will be willing to admit them in their full extent.

Instead of this difficult and laborious process, we readily conceive of man in the earliest stages of society as not different, but only less than we are. We suppose him deprived of the arts, unacquainted with the truths of Christianity, without the knowledge obtained from books, and yet only unlike us in the simplicity of his tastes and habitudes. We generalize what we are ourselves, and drop out the particular circumstances and details of our lives, and then suppose ourselves to have before us the dweller in Mesopotamia in the days of Abraham, or the patriarchs going down to gather corn in Egypt. This imaginary picture of a patriarchal religion has had such charms for some minds, that they have hoped to see it realized on the wreck of Christianity itself. They did not perceive that they were deluding themselves with a vacant dream which has never yet filled the heart of man.

Philosophers have illustrated the origin of government by a picture of mankind meeting together in a large plain, to determine the rights of governors and subjects; in like manner we may assist imagination, by conceiving the multitude of men with their tribes, races, features, languages, convoked in the plains of the East, to hear from some inspired legislator as Moses, or from the voice of God himself, a revelation about God and nature, and their future destiny; such a revelation in the first day of the world's history as the day of judgement will be at the last. Let us fix our minds, not on the Giver of the revelation, but on the receivers of it. Must there not have been in them some common sense, or faculty, or feeling, which made them capable

of receiving it? Must there not have been an apprehension which made it a revelation to them? Must they not all first have been of one language and one speech? And, what is implied by this, must they not all have had one mental structure, and received the same impressions from external objects, the same lesson from nature? Or, to put the hypothesis in another form, suppose that by some electric power the same truth could have been made to sound in the ears and flash before the eyes of all, would they not have gone their ways, one to tents, another to cities; one to be a tiller of the ground, another to be a feeder of sheep; one to be a huntsman, another to be a warrior; one to dwell in woods and forests, another in boundless plains; one in valleys, one on mountains, one beneath the liquid heaven of Greece and Asia, another in the murky regions of the north? And amid all this diversity of habits, occupations, scenes, climates, what common truth of religion could we expect to remain while man was man, the creature in a great degree of outward circumstances? Still less reason would there be to expect the preservation of a primeval truth throughout the world, if we imagine the revelation made, not to the multitude of men, but to a single individual, and not committed to writing for above two thousand years.

ii. The theory of a primitive tradition, common to all mankind, has only to be placed distinctly before the mind, to make us aware that it is the fabric of a vision. But, even if it were conceivable, it would be inconsistent with facts. Ancient history says nothing of a general religion, but of particular national ones; of received beliefs about places and persons, about animal life, about the sun, moon, and stars, about the Divine essence permeating the world, about gods in the likeness of men appearing



in battles and directing the course of states, about the shades below, about sacrifices, purifications, initiations, magic, mysteries. These were the religions of nature, which in historical times have received from custom also a second nature. Early poetry shows us the same religions in a previous stage, while they are still growing, and fancy is freely playing around the gods of its own creation. Language and mythology carry us a step further back, into a mental world yet more distant and more unlike our own. That world is a prison of sense, in which outward objects take the place of ideas; in which morality is a fact of nature, and 'wisdom at one entrance quite shut out'. Human beings in that pre-historic age seem to have had only a kind of limited intelligence; they were the slaves, as we should say, of association. They were rooted in particular spots, or wandered up and down upon the earth, confusing themselves and God and nature, gazing timidly on the world around, starting at their very shadows, and seeing in all things a super-human power at the mercy of which they were. They had no distinction of body and soul, mind and matter, physical and moral. Their conceptions were neither here nor there; neither sensible objects, nor symbols of the unseen. Their gods were very near; the neighbouring hill or passing stream, brute matter as we regard it, to them a divinity, because it seemed inspired with a life like their own. They could not have formed an idea of the whole earth, much less of the God who made it. Their mixed modes of thought, their figures of speech, which are not figures, their personifications of nature, their reflections of the individual upon the world, and of the world upon the individual, the omnipresence to them of the sensuous and visible, indicate an intellectual

state which it is impossible for us, with our regular divisions of thought, even to conceive. We must raze from the table of the mind their language, ere they could become capable of a universal religion.

But although we find no vestiges of a primeval revelation, and cannot imagine how such a revelation could have been possible consistently with those indications of the state of man which language and mythology supply, it is true, nevertheless, that the primitive peoples of mankind have a religious principle common to all. Religion, rather than reason, is the faculty of man in the earliest stage of his existence. Reverence for powers above him is the first principle which raises the individual out of himself; the germ of political order, and probably also of social life. It is the higher necessity of nature, as hunger and the animal passions are the lower. 'The clay' falls before the rising dawn; it may stumble over stocks and stones; but it is struggling upwards into a higher day. The worshipper is drawn as by a magnet to some object out of himself. He is weak and must have a god; he has the feeling of a slave towards his master, of a child towards its parents, of the lower animals towards himself. The Being whom he serves is, like himself, passionate and capricious; he sees him starting up everywhere in the unmeaning accidents of life. The good which he values himself he attributes to him; there is no proportion in his ideas; the great power of nature is the lord also of sheep and oxen. Sometimes, with childish joy, he invites the god to drink of his beverage or eat of his food; at other times, the orgies which he enacts before him, lead us seriously to ask the question 'whether religion may not in truth have been a kind of madness'. He propitiates him and

is himself soothed and comforted; again he is at his mercy, and propitiates him again. So the dream of life is rounded to the poor human creature: incapable as he is of seeing his true Father, religion seems to exercise over him a fatal overpowering influence; the religion of nature we cannot call it, for that would of itself lead to a misconception, but the religion of the place in which he lives, of the objects which he sees, of the tribe to which he belongs, of the animal forms which range in the wilds around him, mingling strangely with the witness of his own spirit that there is in the world a Being above him.

Out of this troubled and perplexed state of the human fancy the great religions of the world arose, all of them in different degrees affording a rest to the mind, and reducing to rule and measure the wayward impulses of human nature. All of them had a history in antecedent ages; there is no stage in which they do not offer indications of an earlier religion which preceded them. Whether they came into being, like some geological formations, by slow deposits, or, like others, by the shock of an earthquake, that is, by some convulsion and settlement of the human mind, is a question which may be suggested, but cannot be answered. The Hindoo Pantheon, even in the antique form in which the world of deities is presented in the Vedas, implies a growth of fancy and ceremonial which may have continued for thousands of years. Probably at a much earlier period than we are able to trace them, religions, like languages, had their distinctive characters with corresponding differences in the first rude constitution of society. As in the case of languages, it is a fair subject of inquiry, whether they do not all mount up to some elementary type



in which they were more nearly allied to sense; a primeval religion, in which we may imagine the influence of nature was analogous to the first impressions of the outward world on the infant's wandering eyesight, and the earliest worship may be compared with the first use of signs or stammering of speech. Such a religion we may conceive as springing from simple instinct; yet an instinct higher, even in its lowest degree, than the instinct of the animal creation; in which the fear of nature combined with the assertion of sway over it, which had already a law of progress, and was beginning to set bounds to the spiritual chaos. Of this aboriginal state we only 'entertain conjecture'; it is beyond the horizon, even when the eye is strained to the uttermost.

But if the first origin of the heathen religions is in the clouds, their decline, though a phenomenon with which we are familiar in history, of which in some parts of the world we are living witnesses, is also obscure to us. The kind of knowledge that we have of them is like our knowledge of the ways of animals; we see and observe, but we cannot get inside them; we cannot think or feel with their worshippers. Most or all of them are in a state of decay; they have lost their life or creative power; once adequate to the wants of man, they have ceased to be so for ages. Naturally we should imagine that the religion itself would pass away when its meaning was no longer understood; that with the spirit, the letter too would die; that when the circumstances of a nation changed, the rites of worship to which they had given birth would be forgotten. The reverse is the fact. Old age affords examples of habits which become insane and inveterate at a time when they have no longer an object; that is an image of the antiquity of religions. Modes of worship, rules of

purification, set forms of words, cling with a greater tenacity when they have no meaning or purpose. The habit of a week or a month may be thrown off; not the habit of a thousand years. The hand of the past lies heavily on the present in all religions; in the East it is a yoke which has never been shaken off. Empire, freedom, among the educated classes belief may pass away, and yet the routine of ceremonial continues; the political glory of a religion may be set at the time when its power over the minds of men is most ineradicable.

One of our first inquiries in reference to the elder religions of the world is how we may adjust them to our own moral and religious ideas. Moral elements seem at first sight to be wholly wanting in them. In the modern sense of the term, they are neither moral nor immoral, but natural; they have no idea of right and wrong, as distinct from the common opinion or feeling of their age and country. No action in Homer, however dishonourable or treacherous, calls forth moral reprobation. Neither gods nor men are expected to present any ideal of justice or virtue; their power or splendour may be the theme of the poet's verse, not their truth or goodness. The only principle on which the Homeric deities reward mortals, is in return for gifts and sacrifices, or from personal attachment. A later age made a step forwards in morality and backwards at the same time; it acquired clearer ideas of right and wrong, but found itself encumbered with conceptions of fate and destiny. The vengeance of the Eumenides has but a rude analogy with justice; the personal innocence of the victim whom the gods pursued is a part of the interest, in some instances, of Greek tragedy. Higher and holier thoughts of the Divine nature appear in Pindar and Sophocles, and

philosophy sought to make religion and mythology the vehicles of moral truth. But it was no part of their original meaning.

Yet, in a lower sense, it is true that the heathen religions, even in their primitive form, are not destitute of morality. Their morality is unconscious morality, not 'man a law to himself', but 'man bound by the will of a superior being'. Ideas of right and wrong have no place in them, yet the first step has been made from sense and appetite into the ideal world. He who denies himself something, who offers up a prayer, who practises a penance, performs an act, not of necessity, nor of choice, but of duty; he does not simply follow the dictates of passion, though he may not be able to give a reason for the performance of his act. He whose God comes first in his mind has an element within him which in a certain degree sanctifies his life by raising him above himself. He has some common interest with other men, some unity in which he is comprehended with them. There is a preparation for thoughts yet higher; he contrasts the permanence of divine and the fleeting nature of human things; while the generations of men pass away 'like leaves', the form of his God is unchanging, and grows not old.

Differences in modes of thought render it difficult for us to appreciate what spiritual elements lurked in disguise among the primitive peoples of mankind. Many allowances must be made before we judge them by our own categories. They are not to be censured for indecency because they had symbols which to after ages became indecent and obscene. Neither were they mere Fetish worshippers because they use sensuous expressions. Religion, like language, in early ages takes the form of sense, but that form of sense is also the embodiment of thought. The



stream and the animal are not adored by man in heathen countries because they are destitute of life or reason, but because they seem to him full of mystery and power. It was with another feeling than that of a worshipper of matter that the native of the East first prostrated himself before the rising sun, in whose beams his nature seemed to revive, and his soul to be absorbed. The most childish superstitions are often nothing more than misunderstood relics of antiquity. There are the remains of Fetishism in the charms and cures of Christian countries; no one regards the peasant who uses them as a Fetish worshipper. Many other confusions have their parallel among ourselves; if we only knew it. For indeed our own ideas in religion, as in everything else, seem clearer to us than they really are, because they are our own. To expect the heathen religions to conform to other modes of thought, is as if the inhabitant of one country were to complain of the inhabitant of another for not speaking the same language with him. Our whole attitude towards nature is different from theirs: to us all is 'law'; to them it was all life and fancy, inconsecutive as a dream. Nothing is more deeply fixed to us than the dualism of body and soul, mind and matter; they knew of no such distinction. But we cannot infer from this a denial of the existence of mind or soul; because they use material images, it would be ridiculous to describe the Psalmist or the prophet Isaiah as materialists; whether in heathen poets or in the Jewish Scriptures, such language belongs to an intermediate state, which has not yet distinguished the spheres of the spiritual and the sensuous. Childhood has been often used as the figure of such a state, but the figure is only partially true, for the childhood of the human race is the childhood of

grown up men, and in the child of the nineteenth century there is a piece also of the man of the nineteenth century. Less obvious differences in speech and thought are more fallacious. The word 'God' means something as dissimilar among ourselves and the Greeks as can possibly be imagined; even in Greek alone the difference of meaning can hardly be exaggerated. It includes beings as unlike each other as the muscular, eating and drinking deities of Homer, and the abstract Being of Parmenides, or the Platonic idea of good. All religions of the world use it, however different their conceptions of God may be—polytheistic, pantheistic, monotheistic: it is universal, and also individual; or rather, from being universal, it has become individual, a logical process which has quickened and helped to develop the theological one. Other words, such as prayer, sacrifice, expiation, in like manner vary in meaning with the religion of which they are the expression. The Homeric sacrifice is but a feast of gods and men, destitute of any sacrificial import. Under expiations for sin are included two things which to us are distinct, atonement for moral guilt and accidental pollution. Similar ambiguities occur in the ideas of a future life. The sapless ghosts in Homer are neither souls nor bodies, but a sort of shadowy beings. A like uncertainty extends in the Eastern religions to some of the first principles of thought and being: whether the negative is not also a positive; whether the mind of man is not also God; whether this world is not another; whether privation of existence may not in some sense be existence still.

These are a few of the differences for which we have to allow in a comparison of our own and other times and countries. We must say to ourselves, at every step, human nature in that age was unlike the

human nature with which we are acquainted, in language, in modes of thought, in morality, in its conception of the world. Yet it was more like than these differences alone would lead us to suppose. The feelings of men draw nearer than their thoughts; their natural affections are more uniform than their religious systems. Marriage, burial, worship, are at least common to all nations. There never has been a time in which the human race was absolutely without social laws; in which there was no memory of the past; no reverence for a higher power. More defined religious ideas, where the understanding comes into play, grow more different; it is by comparison they are best explained; like natural phenomena, they derive their chief light from analogy with each other. Travelling in thought from China, by way of India, Persia, and Egypt, to the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, we distinguish a succession of stages in which the worship of nature is developed; in China as the rule or form of political life, almost grovelling on the level of sense; in India rising into regions of thought and fancy, and allowing a corresponding play in the institutions and character of the people; in Egypt wrapping itself in the mystery of antiquity, becoming the religion of death and of the past; in Persia divided between light and darkness, good and evil, the upper and the under world; in Phoenicia, fierce and licentious, imbued with the spirit of conquest and colonization. These are the primary strata of the religions of mankind, often shifting their position, and sometimes overlapping each other; they are distinguished from the secondary strata, as the religions of nations from the inspirations of individuals. Thrown into the form of abstraction, they express the various degrees of distinctness with



which man realizes his own existence or that of a Divine Being and the relations between them. But they are also powers which have shaped the course of events in the world. The secret is contained in them, why one nation has been free, another a slave; why one nation has dwelt like ants upon a hillock, another has swept over the earth; why one nation has given up its life almost without a struggle, while another has been hewn limb from limb in the conflict with its conquerors. All these religions contributed to the polytheism of Greece; some elements derived from them being absorbed in the first origin of the Greek religion and language, others acting by later contact, some also by contrast.

‘Nature through five cycles ran,  
And in the sixth she moulded man.’

We may conclude this portion of our subject with a few remarks on the Greek and Roman religions, which have a peculiar interest to us for several reasons: first, because they have exercised a vast influence on modern Europe, the one through philosophy, the other through law, and both through literature and poetry; secondly, because, almost alone of the heathen religions, they came into contact with early Christianity; thirdly, because they are the religions of ancient, as Christianity is of modern civilization.

The religion of Greece is remarkable for being a literature as well as a religion. Its deities are ‘nameless’ to us before Homer; to the Greek himself it began with the Olympic family. Whatever dim notions existed of chaos and *primaeval* night—of struggles for ascendancy between the elder and younger gods, these fables are buried out of sight before Greek mythology begins. The Greek came

forth at the dawn of day, himself a youth in the youth of the world, drinking in the life of nature at every pore. The form which his religion took was fixed by the Homeric poems, which may be regarded as standing in the same relation to the religion of Greece as sacred books to other forms of religion. It cannot be said that they aroused the conscience of men; the more the Homeric poems are considered, the more evident it becomes that they have no inner life of morality like Hebrew prophecy, no Divine presence of good slowly purging away the mist that fills the heart of man. What they implanted, what they preserved in the Greek nation, was not the sense of truth or right, but the power of conception and expression—harmonies of language and thought which enabled man to clothe his ideas in forms of everlasting beauty. They stamped the Greek world as the world of art; its religion became the genius of art. And more and more in successive generations, with the co-operation of some political causes, the hand of art impressed itself on religion; in poetry, in sculpture, in architecture, in festivals and dramatic contests, until in the artistic phase of human life the religious is absorbed. And the form of man, and the intellect of man, as if in sympathy with this artistic development, attained a symmetry and power of which the world has never seen the like.

And yet the great riddle of existence was not answered: its deeper mysteries were not explored. The strife of man with himself was healed only superficially; there was beauty and proportion everywhere, but no 'true being'. The Jupiter Olympius of Phidias might seem worthy to preside over the Greek world which he summoned before him; the Olympic victor might stand godlike in the

fulness of manly vigour; but where could the weak and mean appear? what place was found for the slave or captive? Could bereaved parents acquiesce in the 'sapless shades' of Homer, or the moral reflections of Thucydides? Was there not some deeper intellectual or spiritual want which man felt, some taste of immortality which he had sometimes experienced, which made him dissatisfied with his earthly state?

No religion that failed to satisfy these cries of nature could become the religion of mankind. Greek art and Greek literature, losing something of their original refinement, spread themselves over the Roman world; except Christianity, they have become the richest treasure of modern Europe. But the religion of Greece never really grew in another soil, or beneath another heaven; it was local and national: dependent on the fine and subtle perceptions of the Greek race; though it amalgamated its deities with those of Egypt and Rome, its spirit never swayed mankind. It has a truer title to permanence and universality in the circumstance that it gave birth to philosophy.

The Greek mind passed, almost unconsciously to itself, from polytheism to monotheism. While offering up worship to the Dorian Apollo, performing vows to Esculapius, panic-stricken about the mutilation of the Hermae, the Greek was also able to think of God as an idea, Θεός not Ζεύς. In this generalized or abstract form the Deity presided over daily life. Not a century after Anaxagoras had introduced the distinction of mind and matter, it was the belief of all philosophic inquirers that God was mind, or the object of mind. The Homeric gods were beginning to be out of place; philosophy could not distinguish Apollo from Athene, or Leto



from Here. Unlike the saints of the middle ages, they suggested no food for meditation; they were only beautiful forms, without individual character. By the side of religion and art, speculation had arisen and waxed strong, or rather it might be described as the inner life which sprang from their decay. The clouds of mythology hung around it; its youth was veiled in forms of sense; it was itself a new sort of poetry or religion. Gradually it threw off the garment of sense; it revealed a world of ideas. It is impossible for us to conceive the intensity of these ideas in their first freshness: they were not ideas, but gods, penetrating into the soul of the disciple, sinking into the mind of the human race; objects, not of speculation only, but of faith and love. To the old Greek religion, philosophy might be said to stand in a relation not wholly different from that which the New Testament bears to the Old; the one putting a spiritual world in the place of a temporal, the other an intellectual in the place of a sensuous; and to mankind in general it taught an everlasting lesson, not indeed that of the Gospel of Christ, but one in a lower degree necessary for man, enlarging the limits of the human mind itself, and providing the instruments of every kind of knowledge.

What the religion of Greece was to philosophy and art, that the Roman religion may be said to have been to political and social life. It was the religion of the family; the religion also of the empire of the world. Beginning in rustic simplicity, the traces of which it ever afterwards retained, it grew with the power of the Roman state, and became one with its laws. No fancy or poetry moulded the forms of the Roman gods; they are wanting in character and hardly distinguishable from one another. Not what they were, but their worship,

is the point of interest about them. Those inanimate beings occasionally said a patriotic word at some critical juncture of the Roman affairs, but they had no attributes or qualities; they are the mere impersonation of the needs of the state. They were easily identified in civilized and literary times with the Olympic deities, but the transformation was only superficial. Greece never conquered the religion of its masters. Great as was the readiness in later times to admit the worship of foreign deities, endless as were the forms of private superstition, these intrusions never weakened or broke the legal hold of the Roman religion. It was truly the 'established' religion. It represented the greatness and power of Rome. The deification of the Emperor, though disagreeable to the more spiritual and intellectual feelings of that age of the world, was its natural development. While Rome lasted the Roman religion lasted; like some vast fabric which the destroyers of a great city are unable wholly to demolish, it continued, though in ruins, after the irruption of the Goths, and has exercised, through the medium of the civil law, a power over modern Europe.

More interesting for us than the pursuit of this subject into further details is the inquiry, in what light the philosopher regarded the religious system within the circle of which he lived; the spirit of which animated Greek and Roman poetry, the observance of which was the bond of states. In the age of the Antonines, more than six hundred years had passed away since the Athenian people first became conscious of the contrariety of the two elements; and yet the wedge which philosophy had inserted in the world seemed to have made no impression on the deeply rooted customs of mankind. The ever-flowing stream of ideas was too feeble to

overthrow the intrenchments of antiquity. The course of individuals might be turned by philosophy; it was not intended to reconstruct the world. It looked on and watched, seeming, in the absence of any real progress, to lose its original force. Paganism tolerated; it had nothing to fear. Socrates and Plato in an earlier, Seneca and Epictetus in a later age, acquiesced in this heathen world, unlike as it was to their own intellectual conceptions of a divine religion. No Greek or Roman philosopher was also a great reformer of religion. Some, like Socrates, were punctual in the observance of religious rites, paying their vows to the gods, fearful of offending against the letter as well as the spirit of divine commands; they thought that it was hardly worth while to rationalize the Greek mythology, when there were so many things nearer home to do. Others, like the Epicureans, transferred the gods into a distant heaven, where they were no more heard of; some, like the Stoics, sought to awaken a deeper sense of moral responsibility. There were devout men, such as Plutarch, who thought with reverence of the past, seeking to improve the old heathen faith, and also lamenting its decline; there were scoffers, too, like Lucian, who found inexhaustible amusement in the religious follies of mankind. Others, like Herodotus in earlier ages, accepted with childlike faith the more serious aspect of heathenism, or contented themselves, like Thucydides, with ignoring it. The world, 'wholly given to idolatry', was a strange inconsistent spectacle to those who were able to reflect, which was seen in many points of view. The various feelings with which different classes of men regarded the statues, temples, sacrifices, oracles, and festivals of the gods, with which they looked upon the conflict of religions meeting on



the banks of the Tiber, are not exhausted in the epigrammatic formula of the modern historian: 'All the heathen religions were looked upon by the vulgar as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, by the magistrate as equally useful.'

Such was the later phase of the religion of nature, with which Christianity came into conflict. It had supplied some of the needs of men by assisting to build up the fabric of society and law. It had left room for others to find expression in philosophy or art. But it was a world divided against itself. It contained two nations or opinions 'struggling in its womb'; the nation or opinion of the many, and the nation or opinion of the few. It was bound together in the framework of law or custom, yet its morality fell below the natural feelings of mankind, and its religious spirit was confused and weakened by the admixture of foreign superstitions. It was a world of which it is not difficult to find traces that it was self-condemned. It might be compared to a fruit, the rind of which was hard and firm, while within it was soft and decaying. Within this outer rind or circle, for two centuries and a half, Christianity was working; at last it appeared without, itself the seed or kernel of a new organization. That when the conflict was over, and the world found itself Christian, many elements of the old religion still remained, and reasserted themselves in Christian forms; that the 'ghost of the dead Roman Empire' lingered 'about the grave thereof'; that Christianity accomplished only imperfectly what heathenism failed to do at all, is a result unlike pictures that are sometimes drawn, but sadly in accordance with what history teaches of mankind and of human nature.

## § 4.

Natural religion is not only concerned with the history of the religions of nature, nor does it only reflect that 'light of the Gentiles' which philosophy imparted; it has to do with the present as well as with the past, with Christian as well as heathen countries. Revealed religion passes into natural, and natural religion exists side by side with revealed; there is a truth independent of Christianity; and the daily life of Christian men is very different from the life of Christ. This general or natural religion may be compared to a wide-spread lake, shallow and motionless, rather than to a living water,—the overflowing of the Christian faith over a professing Christian world, the level of which may be at one time higher or lower; it is the religion of custom or prescription, or rather the unconscious influence of religion on the minds of men in general; it includes also the speculative idea of religion when taken off the Christian foundation. Natural religion, in this modern sense, has a relation both to philosophy and life. That is to say (1), it is a theory of religion which appeals to particular evidences for the being of a God, though resting, perhaps more safely, on the general conviction that 'this universal frame cannot want a mind'. But it has also a relation to life and practice (2), for it is the religion of the many; the average, as it may be termed, of religious feeling in a Christian land, the leaven of the Gospel hidden in the world. St. Paul speaks of those 'who knowing not the law are a law unto themselves'. Experience seems to show that something of the same kind must be acknowledged in Christian as well as in heathen countries; which may be conveniently considered under the head of natural religion.

Arguments for the being of a God are of many kinds. There are arguments from final causes, and arguments from first causes, and arguments from ideas; logical forms, as they appear to be, in which different metaphysical schools mould their faith. Of the first sort the following may be taken as an instance:—A person walking on the seashore finds a watch or other piece of mechanism; he observes its parts, and their adaptation to each other; he sees the watch in motion, and comprehends the aim of the whole. In the formation of that senseless material he perceives that which satisfies him that it is the work of intelligence, or, in other words, the marks of design. And looking from the watch to the world around him, he seems to perceive innumerable ends, and innumerable actions tending to them, in the composition of the world itself, and in the structure of plants and animals. Advancing a step further, he asks himself the question, why he should not acknowledge the like marks of design in the moral world also; in passions and actions, and in the great end of life. Of all there is the same account to be given—‘the machine of the world’, of which God is the Maker.

This is the celebrated argument from final causes for the being of a God, the most popular of the arguments of natural religion, partly because it admits of much ingenious illustration, and also because it is tangible and intelligible. Ideas of a Supreme Being must be given through something, for it is impossible that we should know Him as He is. And the truest representation that we can form of God is, in one sense, that which sets forth His nature most vividly; yet another condition must also be remembered, viz. that this representation ought not only to be the most distinct, but the highest and



holiest possible. Because we cannot see Him as He is, that is no reason for attributing to Him the accidents of human personality. And, in using figures of speech, we are bound to explain to all who are capable of understanding, that we speak in a figure only, and to remind them that names by which we describe the being or attributes of God need a correction in the silence of thought. Even logical categories may give as false a notion of the Divine nature in our own age, as graven images in the days of the patriarchs. However legitimate or perhaps necessary the employment of them may be, we must place ourselves not below, but above them.

(*a*) In the argument from final causes, the work of the Creator is compared to a work of art. Art is a poor figure of nature; it has no freedom or luxuriance. Between the highest work of art and the lowest animal or vegetable production, there is an interval which will never be spanned. The miracle of life derives no illustration from the handicraftsman putting his hand to the chisel, or anticipating in idea the form which he is about to carve. More truly might we reason, that what the artist is, the God of nature is not. For all the processes of nature are unlike the processes of art. If, instead of a watch, or some other piece of curious and exquisite workmanship, we think of a carpenter and a table, the force of the argument seems to vanish, and the illustration becomes inappropriate and unpleasing. The ingenuity and complexity of the structure, and not the mere appearance of design, makes the watch a natural image of the creation of the world.

(*β*) But not only does the conception of the artist supply no worthy image of the Creator and His work; the idea of design which is given by it

requires a further correction before it can be transferred to nature. The complication of the world around us is quite different from the complexity of the watch. It is not a regular and finite structure, but rather infinite in irregularity; which instead of design often exhibits absence of design, such as we cannot imagine any architect of the world contriving; the construction of which is far from appearing, even to our feeble intelligence, the best possible, though it, and all things in it, are very good. If we fix our minds on this very phrase 'the machine of the world', we become aware that it is unmeaning to us. The watch is separated and isolated from other matter; dependent indeed on one or two general laws of nature, but otherwise cut off from things around. But nature, the more we consider it, the more does one part appear to be linked with another; there is no isolation here; the plants grow in the soil which has been preparing for them through a succession of geological eras, they are fed by the rain and nourished by light and air; the animals depend for their life on all inferior existences.

( $\gamma$ ) This difference between art and nature leads us to observe another defect in the argument from final causes—that, instead of putting the world together, it takes it to pieces. It fixes our minds on those parts of the world which exhibit marks of design, and withdraws us from those in which marks of design seem to fail. There are formations in nature, such as the hand, which have a kind of mechanical beauty, and show in a striking way, even to an uneducated person, the wonder and complexity of creation. In like manner we feel a momentary surprise in finding out, through the agency of a microscope, that the minutest creatures have their fibres, tissues, vessels. And yet the knowledge of this is

but the most fragmentary and superficial knowledge of nature; it is the wonder in which philosophy begins, very different from the comprehension of this universal frame in all its complexity and in all its minuteness. And from this elementary notion of nature, we seek to form an idea of the Author of nature. As though God were in the animal frame and not also in the dust to which it turns; in the parts, and not equally in the whole; in the present world, and not also in the antecedent ages which have prepared for its existence.

(δ) Again, this teleological argument for the being of God gives an erroneous idea of the moral government of the world. For it leads us to suppose that all things are tending to some end; that there is no prodigality or waste, but that all things are, and are made, in the best way possible. Our faith must be tried to find a use for barren deserts, for venomous reptiles, for fierce wild beasts, nay, for the sins and miseries of mankind. Nor does 'there seem to be any resting place', until the world and all things in it are admitted to have some end impressed upon them by the hand of God, but unseen to us. Experience is cast aside while our meditations lead us to conceive the world under this great form of a final cause. All that is in nature is best; all that is in human life is best. And yet every one knows instances in which nature seems to fail of its end,—in which life has been cut down like a flower, and trampled under foot of man.

(ε) There is another way in which the argument from final causes is suggestive of an imperfect conception of the Divine Being. It presents God to us exclusively in one aspect, not as a man, much less as a spirit holding communion with our spirit, but only as an artist. We conceive of Him, as in the



description of the poet, standing with compasses over sea and land, and designing the wondrous work. Does not the image tend to make the spiritual creation an accident of the material? For although it is possible, as Bishop Butler has shown, to apply the argument from final causes, as a figure of speech, to the habits and feelings, this adaptation is unnatural, and open even to greater objections than its application to the physical world. For how can we distinguish true final causes from false ones? how can we avoid confusing what ought to be with what is—the fact with the law?

(§) If we look to the origin of the notion of a final cause, we shall feel still further indisposed to make it the category under which we sum up the working of the Divine Being in creation. As Aristotle, who probably first made a philosophical use of the term, says, it is transferred from mind to matter; in other words, it clothes facts in our ideas. Lord Bacon offers another warning against the employment of final causes in the service of religion: ‘they are like the vestals consecrated to God, and are barren.’ They are a figure of speech which adds nothing to our knowledge. When applied to the Creator, they are a figure of a figure; that is to say, the figurative conception of the artist embodied or idealized in his work, is made the image of the Divine Being. And no one really thinks of God in nature under this figure of human skill. As certainly as the man who found a watch or piece of mechanism on the seashore would conclude, ‘here are marks of design, indications of an intelligent artist’, so certainly, if he came across the meanest or the highest of the works of nature, would he infer, ‘this was not made by man, nor by any human art’. He sees in a moment that the seaweed beneath

his feet is something different in kind from the productions of man. What should lead him to say, that in the same sense that man made the watch, God made the seaweed? For the seaweed grows by some power of life, and is subject to certain physiological laws, like all other vegetable or animal substances. But if we say that God created this life, or that where this life ends there His creative power begins, our analogy again fails, for God stands in a different relation to animal and vegetable life from what the artist does to the work of his hands. And, when we think further of God, as a Spirit without body, creating all things by His word, or rather by His thought, in an instant of time, to whom the plan and execution are all one, we become absolutely bewildered in the attempt to apply the image of the artist to the Creator of the world.

These are some of the points in respect of which the argument from final causes falls short of that conception of the Divine nature which reason is adequate to form. It is the beginning of our knowledge of God, not the end. It is suited to the faculties of children rather than of those who are of full age. It belongs to a stage of metaphysical philosophy, in which abstract ideas were not made the subject of analysis; to a time when physical science had hardly learnt to conceive the world as a whole. It is a devout thought which may well arise in the grateful heart when contemplating the works of creation, but must not be allowed to impair that higher intellectual conception which we are able to form of a Creator, any more than it should be put in the place of the witness of God within,

Another argument of the same nature for the being of a God is derived from first causes, and may be stated as follows:—All things that we see are the

results or effects of causes, and these again the effects of other causes, and so on through an immense series. But somewhere or other this series must have a stop or limit; we cannot go back from cause to cause without end. Otherwise the series will have no basis on which to rest. Therefore there must be a first cause, that is, God. This argument is sometimes strengthened by the further supposition that the world must have had a beginning, whence it seems to follow, that it must have a cause external to itself which made it begin; a principle of rest, which is the source of motion to all other things, as ancient philosophy would have expressed it,—hovering in this as in other speculations intermediate between the physical and metaphysical world.

The difficulty about this argument is much the same as that respecting the preceding. So long as we conceive the world under the form of cause and effect, and suppose the first link in the chain to be the same with those that succeed it, the argument is necessary and natural; we cannot escape from it without violence to our reason. Our only doubt will probably be, whether we can pass from the notion of a first cause to that of an intelligent Creator. But when, instead of resting in the word 'cause', we go on to the idea, or rather the variety of ideas which are signified by the word 'cause', the argument begins to dissolve. When we say, 'God is the cause of the world', in what sense of the word cause is this? Is it as life or mind is a cause, or the hammer or hand of the workman, or light or air, or any natural substance? Is it in that sense of the word cause, in which it is almost identified with the effect? or in that sense in which it is wholly external to it? Or when we endeavour to imagine or conceive a common cause of the world and all things in it, do



we not perceive that we are using the word in none of these senses; but in a new one, to which life, or mind, or many other words, would be at least equally applicable? 'God is the life of the world.' That is a poor and somewhat unmeaning expression to indicate the relation of God to the world; yet life is a subtle and wonderful power, pervading all things, and in various degrees animating all things. 'God is the mind of the world.' That is still inadequate as an expression, even though mind can act where it is not, and its ways are past finding out. But when we say, 'God is the cause of the world', that can be scarcely said to express more than that God stands in some relation to the world touching which we are unable to determine whether He is in the world or out of it, 'immanent' in the language of philosophy, or 'transcendent'.

There are two sources from which these and similar proofs of the being of a God are derived: first, analogy; secondly, the logical necessity of the human mind. Analogy supplies an image, an illustration. It wins for us an imaginary world from the void and formless infinite. But whether it does more than this must depend wholly on the nature of the analogy. We cannot argue from the seen to the unseen, unless we previously know their relation to each other. We cannot say at random that another life is the double or parallel of this, and also the development of it; we cannot urge the temporary inequality of this world as a presumption of the final injustice of another. Who would think of arguing from the vegetable to the animal world, except in those points where we had already discovered a common principle? Who would reason that animal life must follow the laws of vegetation in those points which were peculiar to it? Yet many theological arguments have

this fundamental weakness; they lean on faith for their own support; they lower the heavenly to the earthly, and may be used to prove anything.

The other source of these and similar arguments is the logical necessity of the human mind. A first cause, a beginning, an infinite Being limiting our finite natures, is necessary to our conceptions. 'We have an idea of God, there must be something to correspond to our idea,' and so on. The flaw here is equally real, though not so apparent. While we dwell within the forms of the understanding and acknowledge their necessity, such arguments seem unanswerable. But once ask the question, Whence this necessity? was there not a time when the human mind felt no such necessity? is the necessity really satisfied? or is there not some further logical sequence in which I am involved which still remains unanswerable? the whole argument vanishes at once, as the chimera of a metaphysical age. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have been peculiarly fertile in such arguments; the belief in which, whether they have any value or not, must not be imposed upon us as an article of faith.

If we say again, 'that our highest conception must have a true existence', which is the well-known argument of Anselm and Des Cartes for the being of God, still this is no more than saying, in a technical or dialectical form, that we cannot imagine God without imagining that He is. Of no other conception can it be said that it involves existence; and hence no additional force is gained by such a mode of statement. The simple faith in a Divine Being is cumbered, not supported, by evidences derived from a metaphysical system which has passed away. It is a barren logic that elicits the more meagre conception of existence from the higher one of

Divinity. Better for philosophy, as well as faith, to think of God at once and immediately as 'Perfect Being'.

Arguments from first and final causes may be regarded as a kind of poetry of natural religion. There are some minds to whom it would be impossible to conceive of the relation of God to the world under any more abstract form. They, as well as all of us, may ponder in amazement on the infinite contrivances of creation. We are all agreed that none but a Divine power framed them. We differ only as to whether the Divine power is to be regarded as the hand that fashioned, or the intelligence that designed them, or an operation inconceivable to us which we dimly trace and feebly express in words.

That which seems to underlie our conception both of first and final causes, is the idea of law which we see not broken or intercepted, or appearing only in particular spots of nature, but everywhere and in all things. All things do not equally exhibit marks of design, but all things are equally subject to the operation of law. The highest mark of intelligence pervades the whole; no one part is better than another; it is all 'very good'. The absence of design, if we like so to turn the phrase, is a part of the design. Even the less comely parts, like the plain spaces in a building, have elements of use and beauty. He who has ever thought in the most imperfect manner of the universe which modern science unveils, needs no evidence that the details of it are incapable of being framed by anything short of a Divine power. Art, and nature, and science, these three,—the first giving us the conception of the relation of parts to a whole; the second, of endless variety and intricacy, such as no art has ever attained; the third, of uniform laws which amid all the changes of created



things remain fixed as at the first, reaching even to the heavens,—are the witnesses of the Creator in the external world.

Nor can it weaken our belief in a Supreme Being, to observe that the same harmony and uniformity extend also to the actions of men. Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should give law and order to the spiritual, no less than the natural creation? That human beings do not ‘thrust or break their ranks’; that the life of nations, like that of plants or animals, has a regular growth; that the same strata or stages are observable in the religions, no less than the languages of mankind, as in the structure of the earth, are strange reasons for doubting the Providence of God. Perhaps it is even stranger, that those who do not doubt should eye with jealousy the accumulation of such facts. Do we really wish that our conceptions of God should only be on the level of the ignorant; adequate to the passing emotions of human feeling, but to reason inadequate? That Christianity is the confluence of many channels of human thought does not interfere with its Divine origin. It is not the less immediately the word of God because there have been preparations for it in all ages, and in many countries.

The more we take out of the category of chance in the world either of nature or of mind, the more present evidence we have of the faithfulness of God. We do not need to have a chapter of accidents in life to enable us to realize the existence of a personal God, as though events which we can account for were not equally His work. Let not use or custom so prevail in our minds as to make this higher notion of God cheerless or uncomfortable to us. The rays of His presence may still warm us, as well as enlighten

us: Surely He, in whom we live and move and have our being, is nearer to us than He would be if He interfered occasionally for our benefit.

‘The curtain of the physical world is closing in upon us’: What does this mean but that the arms of His intelligence are embracing us on every side? We have no more fear of nature; for our knowledge of the laws of nature has cast out fear. We know Him as He shows himself in them, even as we are known of Him. Do we think to draw near to God by returning to that state in which nature seemed to be without law, when man cowered like the animals before the storm, and in the meteors of the skies and the motions of the heavenly bodies sought to read the purposes of God respecting himself? Or shall we rest in that stage of the knowledge of nature which was common to the heathen philosophers and to the Fathers of the Christian Church? or in that of two hundred years ago, ere the laws of the heavenly bodies were discovered? or of fifty years ago, before geology had established its truths on sure foundations? or of thirty years ago, ere the investigation of old language had revealed the earlier stages of the history of the human mind. At which of these resting-places shall we pause to renew the covenant between Reason and Faith? Rather at none of them, if the first condition of a true faith be the belief in all true knowledge.

To trace our belief up to some primitive revelation, to entangle it in a labyrinth of proofs or analogies, will not infix it deeper or elevate its character. Why should we be willing to trust the convictions of the father of the human race rather than our own, the faith of primitive rather than of civilized times? Or why should we use arguments about the Infinite Being, which, in proportion as

they have force, reduce him to the level of the finite ; and which seem to lose their force in proportion as we admit that God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts? The belief is strong enough without those fictitious supports ; it cannot be made stronger with them. While nature still presents to us its world of unexhausted wonders ; while sin and sorrow lead us to walk by faith, and not by sight ; while the soul of man departs this life knowing not whither it goes ; so long will the belief endure of an Almighty Creator, from whom we came, to whom we return.

Why, again, should we argue for the immortality of the soul from the analogy of the seed and the tree, or the state of human beings before and after birth, when the ground of proof in the one case is wanting in the other, namely, experience? Because the dead acorn may a century hence become a spreading oak, no one would infer that the corrupted remains of animals will rise to life in new forms. The error is not in the use of such illustrations as figures of speech, but in the allegation of them as proofs or evidences after the failure of the analogy is perceived. Perhaps it may be said that in popular discourse they pass unchallenged ; it may be a point of honour that they should be maintained, because they are in Paley or Butler. But evidences for the many which are not evidences for the few are treacherous props to Christianity. They are always liable to come back to us detected, and to need some other fallacy for their support.

Let it be considered, whether the evidences of religion should be separated from religion itself. The Gospel has a truth perfectly adapted to human nature ; its origin and diffusion in the world have a history like any other history. But truth does



not need evidences of the truth, nor does history separate the proof of facts from the facts themselves. It was only in the decline of philosophy the Greeks began to ask about the criterion of knowledge. What would be thought of an historian who should collect all the testimonies on one side of some disputed question, and insist on their reception as a political creed? Such evidences do not require the hand of some giant infidel to pull them down; they fall the moment they are touched. But the Christian faith is in its holy place, uninjured by the fall; the truths of the existence of God, or of the immortality of the soul, are not periled by the observation that some analogies on which they have been supposed to rest are no longer tenable. There is no use in attempting to prove by the misapplication of the methods of human knowledge, what we ought never to doubt.

‘There are two things,’ says a philosopher of the last century; ‘of which it may be said, that the more we think of them, the more they fill the soul with awe and wonder,—the starry heaven above, and the moral law within. I may not regard either as shrouded in darkness, or look for or guess at either in what is beyond, out of my sight. I see them right before me, and link them at once with the consciousness of my own existence. The former of the two begins with place, which I inhabit as a member of the outward world, and extends the connexion in which I stand with it into immeasurable space; in which are worlds upon worlds, and systems upon systems; and so on into the endless times of their revolutions, their beginning and continuance. The second begins with my invisible self; that is to say, my personality, and presents me in a world which has true infinity, but which the lower faculty of the

soul can hardly scan; with which I know myself to be not only as in the world of sight, in an accidental connexion, but in a necessary and universal one. The first glance at innumerable worlds annihilates any importance which I may attach to myself as an animal structure; whilst the matter out of which it is made must again return to the earth (itself a mere point in the universe), after it has been endued, one knows not how, with the power of life for a little season. The second glance exalts me infinitely as an intelligent being, whose personality involves a moral law, which reveals in me a life distinct from that of the animals, independent of the world of sense. So much at least I may infer from the regular determination of my being by this law, which is itself infinite, free from the limitations and conditions of this present life.'

So, in language somewhat technical, has Kant described two great principles of natural religion. 'There are two witnesses,' we may add in a later strain of reflection, 'of the being of God; the order of nature in the world, and the progress of the mind of man. He is not the order of nature, nor the progress of mind, nor both together; but that which is above and beyond them; of which they, even if conceived in a single instant, are but the external sign, the highest evidences of God which we can conceive, but not God Himself. The first to the ancient world seemed to be the work of chance, or the personal operation of one or many Divine beings. We know it to be the result of laws endless in their complexity, and yet not the less admirable for their simplicity also. The second has been regarded, even in our own day, as a series of errors capriciously invented by the ingenuity of individual men. We know it to have a law of its own, a continuous order

which cannot be inverted; not to be confounded with, yet not wholly separate from, the law of nature and the will of God. Shall we doubt the world to be the creation of a Divine power, only because it is more wonderful than could have been conceived by "them of old time"; or human reason to be in the image of God, because it too bears the marks of an overruling law or intelligence?'

§ 5.

Natural religion, in the last sense in which we are to consider it, carries us into a region of thought more practical, and therefore more important, than any of the preceding; it comes home to us; it takes in those who are near and dear to us; even ourselves are not excluded from it. Under this name, or some other, we cannot refuse to consider a subject which involves the religious state of the greater portion of mankind, even in a Christian country. Every Sunday the ministers of religion set before us the ideal of Christian life; they repeat and expand the words of Christ and his Apostles; they speak of the approach of death, and of this world as a preparation for a better. It is good to be reminded of these things. But there is another aspect of Christianity which we must not ignore, the aspect under which experience shows it, in our homes and among our acquaintance, on the level of human things; the level of education, habit, and circumstances on which men are, and on which they will probably remain while they live. This latter phase of religion it is our duty to consider, and not narrow ourselves to the former only.

It is characteristic of this subject that it is full of contradictions; we say one thing at one time about it, another thing at another. Our feelings respecting



individuals are different in their lifetime, and after their death, as they are nearly related to us, or have no claims on our affections. Our acknowledgement of sin in the abstract is more willing and hearty than the recognition of particular sins in ourselves, or even in others. We readily admit that 'the world lieth in wickedness'; where the world is, or of whom it is made up, we are unable to define. Great men seem to be exempt from the religious judgement which we pass on our fellows; it does not occur to persons of taste to regard them under this aspect; we deal tenderly with them, and leave them to themselves and God. And sometimes we rest on outward signs of religion; at other times we guard ourselves and others against trusting to such signs. And commonly we are ready to acquiesce in the standard of those around us, thinking it a sort of impertinence to interfere with their religious concerns; at other times we go about the world as with a lantern, seeking for the image of Christ among men, and are zealous for the good of others, out of season or in season. We need not unravel further this tangled web of thoughts and feelings, which religion, and affection, and habit, and opinion weave. A few words will describe the fact out of which these contradictions arise. It is a side of the world from which we are apt to turn away, perhaps hoping to make things better by fancying them so, instead of looking at them as they really are.

It is impossible not to observe that innumerable persons—shall we say the majority of mankind?—who have a belief in God and immortality, have nevertheless hardly any consciousness of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. They seem to live away from them in the routine of business or of society, 'the common life of all men', not without a sense

of right, and a rule of truth and honesty, yet insensible to what our Saviour meant by taking up the cross and following Him, or what St. Paul meant by 'being one with Christ'. They die without any great fear or lively faith; to the last more interested about concerns of this world than about the hope of another. In the Christian sense they are neither proud nor humble; they have seldom experienced the sense of sin, they have never felt keenly the need of forgiveness. Neither on the other hand do they value themselves on their good deeds, or expect to be saved by their own merits. Often they are men of high moral character; many of them have strong and disinterested attachments, and quick human sympathies; sometimes a stoical feeling of uprightness, or a peculiar sensitiveness to dishonour. It would be a mistake to say they are without religion. They join in its public acts; they are offended at profaneness or impiety; they are thankful for the blessings of life, and do not rebel against its misfortunes. Such persons meet us at every turn. They are those whom we know and associate with; honest in their dealings, respectable in their lives, decent in their conversation. The Scripture speaks to us of two classes represented by the Church and the world, the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the friends and enemies of God. We cannot say in which of these two divisions we should find a place for them.

The picture is a true one, and, if we turn the light round, some of us may find in it a resemblance of ourselves no less than of other men. Others will include us in the same circle in which we are including them. What shall we say to such a state, common as it is to both us and them? The fact that we are considering is not the evil of the world,

but the neutrality of the world, the indifference of the world, the inertness of the world. There are multitudes of men and women everywhere, who have no peculiarly Christian feelings, to whom, except for the indirect influence of Christian institutions, the life and death of Christ would have made no difference, and who have, nevertheless, the common sense of truth and right almost equally with true Christians. You cannot say of them 'there is none that doeth good; no, not one'. The other tone of St. Paul is more suitable,—'When the Gentiles that know not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these not knowing the law are a law unto themselves.' So of what we commonly term the world, as opposed to those who make a profession of Christianity, we must not shrink from saying,—'When men of the world do by nature whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, these not being conscious of the grace of God, do by nature what can only be done by His grace'. Why should we make them out worse than they are? We must cease to speak evil of them, ere they will judge fairly of the characters of religious men. That, with so little recognition of His personal relation to them, God does not cast them off, is a ground of hope rather than of fear,—of thankfulness, not of regret.

Many strange thoughts arise at the contemplation of this intermediate world, which some blindness, or hardness, or distance in nature, separates from the love of Christ. We ask ourselves 'what will become of them after death?' 'For what state of existence can this present life be a preparation?' Perhaps they will turn the question upon us; and we may answer for ourselves and them, 'that we throw ourselves on the mercy of God'. We cannot



deny that in the sight of God they may condemn us; their moral worth may be more acceptable to Him than our Christian feeling. For we know that God is not like some earthly sovereign, who may be offended at the want of attention which we show to him. He can only estimate us always by our fulfilment of moral and Christian duties. When the balance is struck, it is most probable, nay, it is quite certain, that many who are first will be last, and the last first. And this transfer will take place, not only among those who are within the gates of the Christian Church, but from the world also into the Church. There may be some among us who have given the cup of cold water to a brother, 'not knowing it was the Lord'. Some again may be leading a life in their own family which is 'not far from the kingdom of heaven'. We do not say that for ourselves there is more than one way; that way is Christ. But, in the case of others, it is right that we should take into account their occupation, character, circumstances, the manner in which Christianity may have been presented to them, the intellectual or other difficulties which may have crossed their path. We shall think more of the unconscious Christianity of their lives, than of the profession of it on their lips. So that we seem almost compelled to be Christian and Unchristian at once: Christian in reference to the obligations of Christianity upon ourselves; Unchristian, if indeed it be not a higher kind of Christianity, in not judging those who are unlike ourselves by our own standard.

Other oppositions have found their way into statements of Christian truth, which we shall sometimes do well to forget. Mankind are not simply divided into two classes; they pass insensibly from one to the other. The term world is itself ambiguous,

meaning the world very near to us, and yet a long way off from us; which we contrast with the Church, and which we nevertheless feel to be one with the Church, and incapable of being separated. Sometimes the Church bears a high and noble witness against the world, and at other times, even to the religious mind, the balance seems to be even, and the world in its turn begins to bear witness against the Church. There are periods of history in which they both grow together. Little cause as there may be for congratulation in our present state, yet we cannot help tracing, in the last half-century, a striking amelioration in our own and some other countries, testified to by changes in laws and manners. Many reasons have been given for this change: the efforts of a few devoted men in the last, or the beginning of the present [19th], century; a long peace; diffusion of education; increase of national wealth; changes in the principles of government; improvement in the lives of the ministers of religion. No one who has considered this problem will feel that he is altogether able to solve it. He cannot venture to say that the change springs from any bold aggression which the Church has made upon the vices of mankind; nor is it certain that any such effort would have produced the result. In the Apostle's language it must still remain a mystery 'why mankind collectively often become better'; and not less so, 'why, when deprived of all the means and influences of virtue and religion, they do not always become worse'. Even for evil, Nature, that is, the God of nature, has set limits; men do not corrupt themselves endlessly. Here, too, it is, 'Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further'.

Reflections of this kind are not a mere speculation; they have a practical use. They show us the world

as it is, neither lighted up with the aspirations of hope and faith, nor darkened beneath the shadow of God's wrath. They teach us to regard human nature in a larger and more kindly way, which is the first step towards amending and strengthening it. They make us think of the many as well as of the few; as ministers of the Gospel, warning us against preaching to the elect only, instead of seeking to do good to all men. They take us out of the straits and narrownesses of religion, into wider fields in which the analogy of faith is still our guide. They help us to reconcile nature with grace; they prevent our thinking that Christ came into the world for our sakes only, or that His words have no meaning when they are scattered beyond the limits of the Christian Church. They remind us that the moral state of mankind here, and their eternal state hereafter, are not wholly dependent on our poor efforts for their religious improvement; and that the average of men who seem often to be so careless about their own highest interest, are not when they pass away uncared for in His sight.

Doubtless, the lives of individuals that rise above this average are the salt of the earth. They are not to be confounded with the many, because for these latter a place may be found in the counsels of Providence. Those who add the love of their fellow-creatures to the love of God, who make the love of truth the rule of both, bear the image of Christ until His coming again. And yet, probably, they would be the last persons to wish to distinguish themselves from their fellow-creatures. The Christian life makes all things kin; it does not stand out 'angular' against any part of mankind. And that humble spirit which the best of men have ever shown in reference to their brethren, is also the true spirit of the Church towards



the world. If a tone of dogmatism and exclusiveness is unbecoming in individual Christians, is it not equally so in Christian communities? There is no need, because men will not listen to one motive, that we should not present them with another; there is no reason, because they will not hear the voice of the preacher, that they should be refused the blessings of education; or that we should cease to act upon their circumstances, because we cannot awaken the heart and conscience. We are too apt to view as hostile to religion that which only takes a form different from religion, as trade, or politics, or professional life. More truly may religious men regard the world, in its various phases, as in many points a witness against themselves. The exact appreciation of the good as well as the evil of the world is a link of communion with our fellow-men; may it not also be, too, with the body of Christ? There are lessons of which the world is the keeper no less than the Church. Especially have earnest and sincere Christians reason to reflect, if ever they see the moral sentiments of mankind directed against them.

The God of peace rest upon you, is the concluding benediction of most of the Epistles. How can He rest upon us, who draw so many hard lines of demarcation between ourselves and other men; who oppose the Church and the world, Sundays and working days, revelation and science, the past and present, the life and state of which religion speaks and the life which we ordinarily lead? It is well that we should consider these lines of demarcation rather as representing aspects of our life than as corresponding to classes of mankind. It is well that we should acknowledge that one aspect of life or knowledge is as true as the other. Science and revelation touch one another: the past floats down in the present. We

are all members of the same Christian world ; we are all members of the same Christian Church. Who can bear to doubt this of themselves or of their family ? What parent would think otherwise of his child ?—what child of his parent ? Religion holds before us an ideal which we are far from reaching ; natural affection softens and relieves the characters of those we love ; experience alone shows men what they truly are. All these three must so meet as to do violence to none. If, in the age of the Apostles, it seemed to be the duty of the believers to separate themselves from the world and take up a hostile position, not less marked in the present age is the duty of abolishing in a Christian country what has now become an artificial distinction, and seeking by every means in our power, by fairness, by truthfulness, by knowledge, by love unfeigned, by the absence of party and prejudice, by acknowledging the good in all things, to reconcile the Church to the world, the one half of our nature to the other ; drawing the mind off from speculative difficulties, or matters of party and opinion, to that which almost all equally acknowledge and almost equally rest short of—the life of Christ.

# ESSAY ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

## BY FAITH

No doctrine in later times has been looked at so exclusively through the glass of controversy as that of justification. From being the simplest it has become the most difficult; the language of the heart has lost itself in a logical tangle. Differences have been drawn out as far as possible, and then taken back and reconciled. The extreme of one view has more than once produced a reaction in favour of the other. Many senses have been attributed to the same words, and simple statements carried out on both sides into endless conclusions. New formulas of conciliation have been put in the place of old-established phrases, and have soon died away, because they had no root in language or in the common sense or feeling of mankind. The difficulty of the subject has been increased by the different degrees of importance attached to it: while to some it is an *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*, others have never been able to see in it more than a verbal dispute.

This perplexity on the question of righteousness by faith is partly due to the character of the age in which it began to revive. Men felt at the Reformation the need of a spiritual religion, and could no longer endure the yoke which had been put upon their fathers. The heart rebelled against the burden of ordinances; it wanted to take a nearer way to reconciliation with God. But when the struggle was over, and individuals were seeking to impart to



others the peace which they had found themselves, they had no simple or natural expression of their belief. They were alone in a world in which the human mind had been long enslaved. It was necessary for them to go down into the land of the enemy, and get their weapons sharpened before they could take up a position and fortify their camp.

In other words, the Scholastic Logic had been for six centuries previous the great instrument of training the human mind; it had grown up with it, and become a part of it. Neither would it have been more possible for the Reformers to have laid it aside than to have laid aside the use of language itself. Around theology it lingers still, seeming reluctant to quit a territory which is peculiarly its own. No science has hitherto fallen so completely under its power; no other is equally unwilling to ask the meaning of terms; none has been so fertile in reasonings and consequences. The change of which Lord Bacon was the herald has hardly yet reached it; much less could the Reformation have anticipated the New Philosophy.

The whole mental structure of that time rendered it necessary that the Reformers, no less than their opponents, should resort to the scholastic methods of argument. The difference between the two parties did not lie here. Perhaps it may be said with truth that the Reformers were even more schoolmen than their opponents, because they dealt more with abstract ideas, and were more concentrated on a single topic. The whole of Luther's teaching was summed up in a single article, 'Righteousness by Faith'. That was to him the Scriptural expression of a Spiritual religion. But this, according to the manner of that time, could not be left in the simple language of St. Paul. It was to be proved from

Scripture first, then isolated by definition; then it might be safely drawn out into remote consequences.

And yet, why was this? Why not repeat, with a slight alteration of the words rather than the meaning of the Apostle, Neither justification by faith nor justification by works, but 'a new creature'? Was there not yet 'a more excellent way' to oppose things to words,—the life, and spirit, and freedom of the Gospel, to the deadness, and powerlessness, and slavery of the Roman Church? So it seems natural to us to reason, looking back after an interval of three centuries on the weary struggle; so absorbing to those who took part in it once, so distant now either to us or them. But so it could not be. The temper of the times, and the education of the Reformers themselves, made it necessary that one dogmatic system should be met by another. The scholastic divinity had become a charmed circle, and no man could venture out of it, though he might oppose or respond within it.

And thus justification by faith, and justification by works, became the watchword of two parties. We may imagine ourselves at that point in the controversy when the Pelagian dispute had been long since hushed, and that respecting Predestination had not yet begun; when men were not differing about original sin, and had not begun to differ about the Divine decrees. What Luther sought for was to find a formula which expressed most fully the entire, unreserved, immediate dependence of the believer on Christ. What the Catholic sought for was so to modify this formula as not to throw dishonour on the Church by making religion a merely personal, or individual, matter; or on the lives of holy men of old, who had wrought out their salvation by asceticism; or endanger morality by appearing to undervalue

good works. It was agreed by all, that men are saved through Christ;—[that men are saved] not of themselves, but of the grace of God, was equally agreed since the condemnation of Pelagius;—that faith and works imply each other, was not disputed by either. A narrow space is left for the combat, which has to be carried on within the outworks of an earlier creed, in which, nevertheless, great subtlety of human thought and the greatest differences of character admit of being displayed.

On this narrow ground the first question that naturally arises is, how faith is to be defined? is it to include love and holiness, or to be separated from them? If the former, it seems to lose its apprehensive dependent nature, and to be scarcely distinguishable from works; if the latter, the statement is too refined for the common sense of mankind; though made by Luther, it could scarcely be retained even by his immediate followers. Again, is it an act or a state? are we to figure it as a point, or as a line? Is the whole of our spiritual life anticipated in the beginning, or may faith no less than works, justification equally with sanctification, be conceived of as going on to perfection? Is justification an objective act of Divine mercy, or a subjective state of which the believer is conscious in himself? Is the righteousness of faith imputed or inherent, an attribution of the merits of Christ, or a renewal of the human heart itself? What is the test of a true faith? And is it possible for those who are possessed of it to fall away? How can we exclude the doctrine of human merit consistently with Divine justice? How do we account for the fact that some have this faith, and others are without it, this difference being apparently independent of their moral state? If faith comes by grace, is it imparted to few or to



all? And in what relation does the whole doctrine stand to Predestinarianism on the one hand, and to the Catholic or Sacramental theory on the other?

So at many points the doctrine of righteousness by faith touches the metaphysical questions of subject and object, of necessity and freedom, of habits and actions, and of human consciousness, like a magnet drawing to itself philosophy, as it has once drawn to itself the history of Europe. There were distinctions also of an earlier date, with which it had to struggle, of deeper moral import than their technical form would lead us to suppose, such as that of congruity and condignity, in which the analogy of Christianity is transferred to heathenism, and the doer of good works before justification is regarded as a shadow of the perfected believer. Neither must we omit to observe that, as the doctrine of justification by faith had a close connexion with the Pelagian controversy, carrying the decision of the Church a step further, making Divine Grace not only the source of human action, but also requiring the consciousness or assurance of grace in the believer himself: so it put forth its roots in another direction, attaching itself to Anselm as well as Augustine, and comprehending the idea of satisfaction; not now, as formerly, of Christ offered in the sacrifice of the mass, but of one sacrifice, once offered for the sins of men, whether considered as an expiation by suffering, or implying only a reconciliation between God and man, or a mere manifestation of the righteousness of God.

Such is the whole question, striking deep, and spreading far and wide with its offshoots. It is not our intention to enter on the investigation of all these subjects, many of which are interesting as phases of thought in the history of the Church, but

have no bearing on the interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles, and would be out of place here. Our inquiry will embrace two heads: (1) What did St. Paul mean by the expression 'righteousness of faith', in that age ere controversies about his meaning arose? and (2) What do we mean by it, now that such controversies have died away, and the interest in them is retained only by the theological student, and the Church and the world are changed, and there is no more question of Jew or Gentile, circumcision or uncircumcision, and we do not become Christians, but are so from our birth? Many volumes are not required to explain the meaning of the Apostle; nor can the words of eternal life be other than few and simple to ourselves.

There is one interpretation of the Epistles of St. Paul which is necessarily in some degree false; that is, the interpretation put upon them by later controversy. When the minds of men are absorbed in a particular circle of ideas they take possession of any stray verse, which becomes the centre of their world. They use the words of Scripture, but are incapable of seeing that they have another meaning and are used in a different connexion from that in which they employ them. Sometimes there is a degree of similarity in the application which tends to conceal the difference. Thus Luther and St. Paul both use the same term, 'justified by faith'; and the strength of the Reformer's words is the authority of St. Paul. Yet, observe how far this agreement is one of words: how far of things. For Luther is speaking solely of individuals, St. Paul also of nations; Luther of faith absolutely, St. Paul of faith as relative to the law. With St. Paul faith is the symbol of the universality of the Gospel. Luther excludes this or any analogous point of view.

In St. Paul there is no opposition of faith and love ; nor does he further determine righteousness by faith as meaning a faith in the blood or even in the death of Christ ; nor does he suppose consciousness or assurance in the person justified. But all these are prominent features of the Lutheran doctrine. Once more : the faith of St. Paul has reference to the evil of the world of sight ; which was soon to vanish away, that the world in which faith walks might be revealed ; but no such allusion is implied in the language of the Reformer. Lastly : the change in the use of the substantive 'righteousness' to 'justification' is the indication of a wide difference between St. Paul and Luther ; the natural, almost accidental, language of St. Paul having already passed into a technical formula.

These contrasts make us feel that St. Paul can only be interpreted by himself, not from the systems of modern theologians, nor even from the writings of one who had so much in common with him as Luther. It is the spirit and feeling of St. Paul which Luther represents, not the meaning of his words. A touch of nature in both 'makes them kin'. And without bringing down one to the level of the other, we can imagine St. Paul returning that singular affection, almost like an attachment to a living friend, which the great Reformer felt towards the Apostle. But this personal attachment or resemblance in no way lessens the necessary difference between the preaching of Luther and of St. Paul, which arose in some degree perhaps from their individual character, but chiefly out of the different circumstances and modes of thought of their respective ages. At the Reformation we are at another stage of the human mind, in which system and logic and the abstractions of Aristotle have



a kind of necessary force, when words have so completely taken the place of things, that the minutest distinctions appear to have an intrinsic value.

It has been said (and the remark admits of a peculiar application to theology), that few persons know sufficient of things to be able to say whether disputes are merely verbal or not. Yet, on the other hand, it must be admitted that, whatever accidental advantage theology may derive from system and definition, mere accurate statements can never form the substance of our belief. No one doubts that Christianity could be in the fullest sense taught to a child or a savage, without any mention of justification or satisfaction or predestination. Why should we not receive the Gospel as 'little children'? Why should we not choose the poor man's part in the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven? Why elaborate doctrinal abstractions which are so subtle in their meaning as to be in great danger of being lost in their translation from one language to another? which are always running into consequences inconsistent with our moral nature, and the knowledge of God derived from it? which are not the prevailing usage of Scripture, but technical terms which we have gathered from one or two passages, and made the key-notes of our scale? The words satisfaction and predestination nowhere occur in Scripture; the word regeneration only twice, and but once in a sense at all similar to that which it bears among ourselves; the word justification twice only, and nowhere as a purely abstract term.

But although language and logic have strangely transfigured the meaning of Scripture, we cannot venture to say that all theological controversies are questions of words. If from their winding mazes we seek to retrace our steps, we still find differences

which have a deep foundation in the opposite tendencies of the human mind, and the corresponding division of the world itself. That men of one temper of mind adopt one expression rather than another may be partly an accident; but the adoption of an expression by persons of marked character makes the difference of words a reality also. That can scarcely be thought a matter of words which cut in sunder the Church, which overthrew princes, which made the line of demarcation between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the Apostolic age, and is so, in another sense, between Protestant and Catholic at the present day. And in a deeper way of reflection than this, if we turn from the Church to the individual, we seem to see around us opposite natures and characters, whose lives really exhibit a difference corresponding to that of which we are speaking. The one incline to morality, the other to religion; the one to the sacramental, the other to the spiritual; the one to multiplicity in outward ordinances, the other to simplicity; the one consider chiefly the means, the other the end; the one desire to dwell upon doctrinal statements, the other need only the name of Christ; the one turn to ascetic practices, to lead a good life, and to do good to others, the other to faith, humility, and dependence on God. We may sometimes find the opposite attributes combine with each other (there have ever been cross-divisions on this article of belief in the Christian world; the great body of the Reformed Churches, and a small minority of Roman Catholics before the Reformation, being on the one side; and the whole Roman Catholic Church since the Reformation, and a section of the Protestant Episcopalians, and some lesser communions, on the other); still, in general, the first of these characters answers to that doctrine which the Roman Church

sums up in the formula of justification by works; the latter is that temper of mind which finds its natural dogmatic expression in the words 'We are justified by faith'.

These latter words have been carried out of their original circle of ideas into a new one by the doctrines of the Reformation. They have become hardened, stiffened, sharpened by the exigencies of controversy, and torn from what may be termed their context in the Apostolical age. To that age we must return ere we can think in the Apostle's language. His conception of faith, although simpler than our own, has nevertheless a peculiar relation to his own day; it is at once wider, and also narrower, than the use of the word among ourselves,—wider in that it is the symbol of the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, but narrower also in that it is the negative of the law. Faith is the proper technical term which excludes the law; being what the law is not, as the law is what faith is not. No middle term connects the two, or at least none which the Apostle admits, until he has first widened the breach between them to the uttermost. He does not say, 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works (as well as by faith), when he had offered up Isaac his son on the altar?' but only, 'What saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.'

The Jewish conception of righteousness was the fulfilment of the Commandments. He who walked in all the precepts of the law blameless, like Daniel in the Old Testament, or Joseph and Nathanael in the New, was righteous before God. 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life? Thou knowest the commandments. Do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness. All these have I kept from my youth up.' This is a picture of Jewish



righteousness as it presents itself in its most favourable light. But it was a righteousness which comprehended the observance of ceremonial details as well as moral precepts, which confused questions of a new moon or a sabbath with the weightier matters of common honesty or filial duty. It might be nothing more than an obedience to the law as such, losing itself on the surface of religion, in casuistical distinctions about meats and drinks, or vows or forms of oaths, or purifications, without any attempt to make clean that which is within. It might also pierce inward to the dividing asunder of the soul. Then was heard the voice of conscience crying, 'All these things cannot make the doers thereof perfect'. When every external obligation was fulfilled, the internal began. Actions must include thoughts and intentions,—the Seventh Commandment extends to the adultery of the heart; in one word, the law must become a spirit.

But to the mind of St. Paul the spirit presented itself not so much as a higher fulfilment of the law, but as antagonistic to it. From this point of view, it appeared not that man could never fulfil the law perfectly, but that he could never fulfil it at all. What God required was something different in kind from legal obedience. What man needed was a return to God and nature. He was burdened, straitened, shut out from the presence of his Father,—a servant, not a son; to whom, in a spiritual sense, the heaven was become as iron, and the earth brass. The new righteousness must raise him above the burden of ordinances, and bring him into a living communion with God. It must be within, and not without him,—written not on tables of stone, but on fleshly tables of the heart. But inward righteousness was no peculiar privilege of the Israelites; it belonged to

all mankind. And the revelation of it, as it satisfied the need of the individual soul, vindicated also the ways of God to man; it showed God to be equal in justice and mercy to all mankind.

As the symbol of this inward righteousness, St. Paul found an expression—righteousness by faith—derived from those passages in the Old Testament which spoke of Abraham being justified by faith. It was already in use among the Jews; but it was the Apostle who stamped it first with a permanent and universal import. The faith of St. Paul was not the faith of the Patriarchs only, who believed in the promises made to their descendants; it entered within the veil—out of the reach of ordinances—beyond the evil of this present life; it was the instrument of union with Christ, in whom all men were one; whom they were expecting to come from heaven. The Jewish nation itself was too far gone to be saved as a nation: individuals had a nearer way. The Lord was at hand; there was no time for a long life of laborious service. As at the last hour, when we have to teach men rather how to die than how to live, the Apostle could only say to those who would receive it, ‘Believe; all things are possible to him that believes’.

Such are some of the peculiar aspects of the Apostle’s doctrine of righteousness by faith. To our minds it has become a later stage or a particular form of the more general doctrine of salvation through Christ, of the grace of God to man, or of the still more general truth of spiritual religion. It is the connecting link by which we appropriate these to ourselves,—the hand which we put out to apprehend the mercy of God. It was not so to the Apostle. To him grace and faith and the Spirit are not parts of a doctrinal system, but different expressions

of the same truth. 'Beginning in the Spirit' is another way of saying 'Being justified by faith'. He uses them indiscriminately, and therefore we cannot suppose that he could have laid any stress on distinctions between them. Even the apparently precise antithesis of the prepositions *ἐν*, *διὰ* varies in different passages. Only in reference to the law, faith, rather than grace, is the more correct and natural expression. It was Christ or not Christ, the Spirit or not the Spirit, faith and the law, that were the dividing principles: not Christ through faith, as opposed to Christ through works; or the Spirit as communicated through grace, to the Spirit as independent of grace.

Illusive as are the distinctions of later controversies as guides to the interpretation of Scripture, there is another help, of which we can hardly avail ourselves too much,—the interpretation of fact. To read the mind of the Apostle, we must read also the state of the world and the Church by which he was surrounded. Now, there are two great facts which correspond to the doctrine of righteousness by faith, which is also the doctrine of the universality of the Gospel: first, the vision which the Apostle saw on the way to Damascus; secondly, the actual conversion of the Gentiles by the preaching of the Apostle. Righteousness by faith, admission of the Gentiles, even the rejection and restoration of the Jews, are—himself under so many different points of view. The way by which God had led him was the way also by which he was leading other men. When he preached righteousness by faith, his conscience also bore him witness that this was the manner in which he had himself passed from darkness to light, from the burden of ordinances to the power of an endless life. In proclaiming the salvation of the Gentiles, he was



interpreting the world as it was; their admission into the Church had already taken place before the eyes of all mankind; it was a purpose of God that was actually fulfilled, not waiting for some future revelation. Just as when doubts are raised respecting his Apostleship, he cut them short by the fact that he was an Apostle, and did the work of an Apostle; so, in adjusting the relations of Jew and Gentile, and justifying the ways of God, the facts, read aright, are the basis of the doctrine which he teaches. All that he further shows is, that these facts were in accordance with the Old Testament, with the words of the Prophets, and the dealings of God with the Jewish people. And the Apostles at Jerusalem, equally with himself, admitted the success of his mission as an evidence of its truth.

But the faith which St. Paul preached was not merely the evidence of things not seen, in which the Gentiles also had part, nor only the reflection of 'the violence' of the world around him, which was taking the kingdom of heaven by force. The source, the hidden life, from which justification flows, in which it lives, is—Christ. It is true that we nowhere find in the Epistles the expression 'justification by Christ' exactly in the sense of modern theology. But, on the other hand, we are described as dead with Christ, we live with Him, we are members of His body, we follow Him in all the stages of His being. All this is another way of expressing 'We are justified by faith'. That which takes us out of ourselves and links us with Christ, which anticipates in an instant the rest of life, which is the door of every heavenly and spiritual relation, presenting us through a glass with the image of Christ crucified, is faith. The difference between our own mode of thinking and that of the Apostle is mainly this,—that to him

Christ is set forth more as in a picture, and less through the medium of ideas or figures of speech ; and that while we conceive the Saviour more naturally as an object of faith, to St. Paul He is rather the indwelling power of life which is fashioned in him, the marks of whose body he bears, the measure of whose sufferings he fills up.

When in the Gospel it is said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved', this is substantially the same truth as 'We are justified by faith'. It is another way of expressing 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Yet we may note two points of difference, as well as two of resemblance, in the manner in which the doctrine is set forth in the Gospel as compared with the manner of the Epistles of St. Paul. First, in the omission of any connexion between the doctrine of faith in Christ, and the admission of the Gentiles. The Saviour is within the borders of Israel ; and accordingly little is said of the 'sheep not of this fold', or the other husbandmen who shall take possession of the vineyard. Secondly, there is in the words of Christ no antagonism or opposition to the law, except so far as the law itself represented an imperfect or defective morality, or the perversions of the law had become inconsistent with every moral principle. Two points of resemblance have also to be remarked between the faith of the Gospels and of the Epistles. In the first place, both are accompanied by forgiveness of sins. As our Saviour to the disciple who affirms his belief says, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee' ; so St. Paul, when seeking to describe, in the language of the Old Testament, the state of justification by faith, cites the words of David, 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin'. Secondly, they have

both a kind of absoluteness which raises them above earthly things. There is a sort of omnipotence attributed to faith, of which the believer is made a partaker. 'Whoso hath faith as a grain of mustard seed, and should say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done unto him', is the language of our Lord. 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me', are the words of St. Paul.

Faith, in the view of the Apostle, has a further aspect, which is freedom. That quality in us which in reference to God and Christ is faith, in reference to ourselves and our fellow-men is Christian liberty. 'With this freedom Christ has made us free'; 'where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' It is the image also of the communion of the world to come. 'The Jerusalem that is above is free', and 'the creature is waiting to be delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God'. It applies to the Church as now no longer confined in the prison-house of the Jewish dispensation; to the grace of God, which is given irrespectively to all; to the individual, the power of whose will is now loosed; to the Gospel, as freedom from the law, setting the conscience at rest about questions of meats and drinks, and new moons and sabbaths; and, above all, to the freedom from the consciousness of sin: in all these senses the law of the spirit of life is also the law of freedom.

In modern language, assurance has been deemed necessary to the definition of a true faith. There is a sense, too, in which final assurance entered into the conception of the faith of the Epistles. Looking at men from without, it was possible for them to fall away finally; it was possible also to fall without falling away; as St. John says, there is a sin unto



death, and there is a sin not unto death. But looking inwards into their hearts and consciences, their salvation was not a matter of probability; they knew whom they had believed, and were confident that He who had begun the good work in them would continue it unto the end. All calculations respecting the future were to them lost in the fact that they were already saved; to use a homely expression, they had no time to inquire whether the state to which they were called was permanent and final. The same intense faith which separated them from the present world, had already given them a place in the world to come. They had not to win the crown,—it was already won: this life, when they thought of themselves in relation to Christ, was the next; as their union with Him seemed to them more true and real than the mere accidents of their temporal existence.

A few words will briefly recapitulate the doctrine of righteousness by faith as gathered from the Epistles of St. Paul.

Faith, then, according to the Apostle, is the spiritual principle whereby we go out of ourselves to hold communion with God and Christ; not like the faith of the Epistle to the Hebrews, clothing itself in the shadows of the law; but opposed to the law, and of a nature purely moral and spiritual. It frees man from the flesh, the law, the world, and from himself also; that is, from his sinful nature, which is the meeting of these three elements in his spiritual consciousness. And to be 'justified' is to pass into a new state; such as that of the Christian world when compared with the Jewish or Pagan; such as that which St. Paul had himself felt at the moment of his conversion; such as that which he reminds the Galatian converts they had experienced, 'before

whose eyes Jesus Christ was evidently set forth crucified'; an inward or subjective state, to which the outward or objective act of calling, on God's part, through the preaching of the Apostle, corresponded; which, considered on a wider scale, was the acceptance of the Gentiles and of every one who feared God; corresponding in like manner to the eternal purpose of God; indicated in the case of the individual by his own inward assurance; in the case of the world at large, testified by the fact; accompanied in the first by the sense of peace and forgiveness, and implying to mankind generally the last final principle of the Divine Government,—'God concluded all under sin that he might have mercy upon all'.

We acknowledge that there is a difference between the meaning of justification by faith to St. Paul and to ourselves. Eighteen hundred years cannot have passed away, leaving the world and the mind of man, or the use of language, the same as it was. Times have altered, and Christianity, partaking of the social and political progress of mankind, receiving, too, its own intellectual development, has inevitably lost its simplicity. The true use of philosophy is to restore this simplicity; to undo the perplexities which the love of system or past philosophies, or the imperfection of language or logic, have made; to lighten the burden which the traditions of ages have imposed upon us. To understand St. Paul we found it necessary to get rid of definitions and deductions, which might be compared to a mazy undergrowth of some noble forest, which we must clear away ere we can wander in its ranges. And it is necessary for ourselves also to return from theology to Scripture; to seek a truth to live and die in,—not to be the subject of verbal disputes, which entangle the religious sense in scholastic refinements. The words

of eternal life are few and simple, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved'.

Remaining, then, within the circle of the New Testament, which we receive as a rule of life for ourselves, no less than for the early Church, we must not ignore the great differences by which we are distinguished from those for whom it was written. Words of life and inspiration, heard by them with rapture for the first time, are to us words of fixed and conventional meaning; they no longer express feelings of the heart, but ideas of the head. Nor is the difference less between the state of the world then and now; not only of the outward world in which we live, but of that inner world which we ourselves are. The law is dead to us, and we to the law; and the language of St. Paul is relative to what has passed away. The transitions of meaning in the use of the word law tend also to a corresponding variation in the meaning of faith. We are not looking for the immediate coming of Christ, and do not anticipate, in a single generation, the end of human things, or the history of a life in the moment of baptism or conversion. To us time and eternity have a fixed boundary, between them there is a gulf which we cannot pass; we do not mingle in our thoughts earth and heaven. Last of all, we are in a professing Christian world, in which religion, too, has become a sort of business; moreover, we see a long way off truths of which the first believers were eye-witnesses. Hence it has become difficult for us to conceive the simple force of such expressions as 'dead with Christ', 'if ye then be risen with Christ',—which are repeated in prayers or sermons, but often convey no distinct impression to the minds of the hearers.

The neglect of these differences between ourselves and the first disciples has sometimes led to a distor-



tion of doctrine and a perversion of life ; where words had nothing to correspond to them, views of human nature have been invented to suit the supposed meaning of St. Paul. Thus, for example, the notion of legal righteousness is indeed a fiction as applied to our own times. Nor, in truth, is the pride of human nature, or the tendency to rebel against the will of God, or to attach an undue value to good works, better founded. Men are evil in all sorts of ways : they deceive themselves and others ; they walk by the opinion of others, and not by faith ; they give way to their passions ; they are imperious and oppressive to one another. But if we look closely, we perceive that most of their sins are not consciously against God ; the pride of rank, or wealth, or power, or intellect, may be shown towards their brethren, but no man is proud towards God. No man does wrong for the sake of rebelling against God. The evil is not that men are bound under a curse by the ever-present consciousness of sin, but that sins pass unheeded by : not that they wantonly offend God, but that they know Him not. So, again, there may be a false sense of security towards God, as is sometimes observed on a death-bed, when mere physical weakness seems to incline the mind to patience and resignation ; yet this more often manifests itself in a mistaken faith, than in a reliance on good works. Or, to take another instance, we are often surprised at the extent to which men who are not professors of religion seem to practise Christian virtues ; yet their state, however we may regard it, has nothing in common with legal or self-righteousness.

And besides theories of religion at variance with experience, which have always a kind of unsoundness, the attempt of men to apply Scripture to their own lives in the letter rather than in the spirit, has been

very injurious in other ways to the faith of Christ. Persons have confused the accidental circumstances or language of the Apostolic times with the universal language of morality and truth. They have reduced human nature to very great straits; they have staked salvation upon the right use of a word; they have enlisted the noblest feelings of mankind in opposition to their 'Gospel'. They have become mystics in the attempt to follow the Apostles, who were not mystics. Narrowness in their own way of life has led to exclusiveness in their judgements on other men. The undue stress which they have laid on particular precepts or texts of Scripture has closed their minds against its general purpose; the rigidity of their own rules has rendered it impossible that they should grow freely to 'the stature of the perfect man'. They have ended in a verbal Christianity, which has preserved words when the meaning of them had changed, taking the form, while it quenched the life, of the Gospel.

Leaving the peculiar and relative aspect of the Pauline doctrine, as well as the scholastic and traditional one, we have again to ask the meaning of justification by faith. We may divide the subject, first, as it may be considered in the abstract; and, secondly, as personal to ourselves.

I. Our justification may be regarded as an act on God's part. It may be said that this act is continuous, and commensurate with our whole lives; that although 'known unto God are all his works from the beginning', yet that, speaking as men, and translating what we term the acts of God into human language, we are ever being more and more justified, as in theological writers we are said also to be more and more sanctified. At first sight it seems that to deny this involves an absurdity; it may be

thought a contradiction to maintain that we are justified at once, but sanctified all our life long. Yet perhaps this latter mode of statement is better than the other, because it presents two aspects of the truth instead of one only; it is also a nearer expression of the inward consciousness of the soul itself. For must we not admit that it is the unchangeable will of God that all mankind should be saved? Justification in the mind of the believer is the perception of this fact, which always was. It is not made more a fact by our knowing it for many years or our whole life. And this is the witness of experience. For he who is justified by faith does not go about doubting in himself or his future destiny, but trusting in God. From the first moment that he turns earnestly to God he believes that he is saved; not from any confidence in himself, but from an overpowering sense of the love of God and Christ.

II. It is an old problem in philosophy,—What is the beginning of our moral being? What is that prior principle which makes good actions produce good habits? Which of those actions raises us above the world of sight? Plato would have answered, the contemplation of the idea of good. Some of ourselves would answer, by the substitution of a conception of moral growth for the mechanical theory of habits. Leaving out of sight our relation to God, we can only say, that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, with powers which we are unable to analyse. It is a parallel difficulty in religion which is met by the doctrine of righteousness by faith. We grow up spiritually, we cannot tell how; not by outward acts, nor always by energetic effort, but stilly and silently, by the grace of God descending upon us, as the dew falls upon the earth. When a person is apprehensive and excited about his future



state, straining every nerve lest he should fall short of the requirements of God, overpowered with the memory of his past sins,—that is not the temper of mind in which he can truly serve God, or work out his own salvation. Peace must go before as well as follow after; a peace, too, not to be found in the necessity of law (as philosophy has sometimes held), but in the sense of the love of God to His creatures. He has no right to this peace, and yet he has it; in the consciousness of his new state there is more than he can reasonably explain. At once and immediately the Gospel tells him that he is justified by faith, that his pardon is simultaneous with the moment of his belief, that he may go on his way rejoicing to fulfil the duties of life; for, in human language, God is no longer angry with him.

III. Thus far, in the consideration of righteousness by faith, we have obtained two points of view, in which, though regarded in the abstract only, the truth of which these words are the symbol has still a meaning; first, as expressing the unchangeableness of the mercy of God; and, secondly, the mysteriousness of human action. As we approach nearer, we are unavoidably led to regard the gift of righteousness rather in reference to the subject than to the object, in relation to man rather than God. What quality, feeling, temper, habit in ourselves answers to it? It may be more or less conscious to us, more of a state and less of a feeling, showing itself rather in our lives than our lips. But for these differences we can make allowance. It is the same faith still, under various conditions and circumstances, and sometimes taking different names.

IV. The expression ‘righteousness by faith’ indicates the personal character of salvation; it is not the tale of works that we do, but we ourselves who

are accepted of God. Who can bear to think of his own actions as they are seen by the eye of the Almighty? Looking at their defective performance, or analysing them into the secondary motives out of which they have sprung, do we seem to have any ground on which we can stand; is there anything which satisfies ourselves? Yet, knowing that our own works cannot abide the judgement of God, we know also that His love is not proportioned to them. He is a Person who deals with us as persons over whom He has an absolute right, who have nevertheless an endless value to Him. When He might exact all, He forgives all; 'the kingdom of heaven' is like not only to a Master taking account with his servants, but to a Father going out to meet his returning son. The symbol and mean of this personal relation of man to God is faith; and the righteousness which consists not in what we do, but in what we are, is the righteousness of faith.

V. Faith may be spoken of, in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the substance of things unseen. But what are the things unseen? Not only an invisible world ready to flash through the material at the appearance of Christ; not angels, or powers of darkness, or even God Himself 'sitting', as the Old Testament described, 'on the circle of the heavens'; but the kingdom of truth and justice, the things that are within, of which God is the centre, and with which men everywhere by faith hold communion. Faith is the belief in the existence of this kingdom; that is, in the truth and justice and mercy of God, who disposes all things—not, perhaps, in our judgement for the greatest happiness of His creatures, but absolutely in accordance with our moral notions. And that this is not seen to be the case here, makes it a matter of faith that it will be

so in some way that we do not at present comprehend. He that believes on God believes, first, that He is ; and, secondly, that He is the Rewarder of them that seek Him.

VI. Now, if we go on to ask what gives this assurance of the truth and justice of God, the answer is, the life and death of Christ, who is the Son of God, and the Revelation of God. We know what He himself has told us of God, and we cannot conceive perfect goodness separate from perfect truth ; nay, this goodness itself is the only conception we can form of God, if we confess what the mere immensity of the material world tends to suggest, that the Almighty is not a natural or even a supernatural power, but a Being of whom the reason and conscience of man have a truer conception than imagination in its highest flights. He is not in the storm, nor in the thunder, nor in the earthquake, but ‘in the still small voice’. And this image of God as He reveals himself in the heart of man is ‘Christ in us the hope of glory’ ; Christ as He once was upon earth in His sufferings rather than His miracles,—the image of goodness and truth and peace and love.

We are on the edge of a theological difficulty ; for who can deny that the image of that goodness may fade from the mind’s eye after so many centuries, or that there are those who recognize the idea and may be unable to admit the fact ? Can we say that this error of the head is also a corruption of the will ? The lives of such unbelievers in the facts of Christianity would sometimes refute our explanation. And yet it is true that Providence has made our spiritual life dependent on the belief in certain truths, and those truths run up into matters of fact, with the belief in which they have ever been associated ; it is true, also, that the most important moral conse-



quences flow from unbelief. We grant the difficulty : no complete answer can be given to it on this side the grave. Doubtless God has provided a way that the sceptic no less than the believer shall receive his due ; He does not need our timid counsels for the protection of the truth. If among those who have rejected the facts of the Gospel history some have been rash, hypercritical, inflated with the pride of intellect, or secretly alienated by sensuality from the faith of Christ,—there have been others, also, upon whom we may conceive to rest a portion of that blessing which comes to such as ‘have not seen and yet have believed’.

VII. In the Epistles of St. Paul, and yet more in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the relation of Christ to mankind is expressed under figures of speech taken from the Mosaic dispensation : He is the Sacrifice for the sins of men, ‘the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world’ ; the Antitype of all the types, the fulfilment in His own person of the Jewish law. Such words may give comfort to those who think of God under human imagery, but they seem to require explanation when we rise to the contemplation of Him as the God of truth, without parts or passions, who knows all things, and cannot be angry with any, or see them other than they truly are. What is indicated by them, to us ‘who are dead to the law’, is, that God has manifested himself in Christ as the God of mercy ; who is more ready to hear than we to pray ; who has forgiven us almost before we ask Him ; who has given us His only Son, and how will He not with Him also give us all things ? They intimate, on God’s part, that He is not extreme to mark what is done amiss ; in human language, ‘he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities’ : on our part, that we say to God, ‘Not

of ourselves, but of thy grace and mercy, O Lord'. Not in the fulness of life and health, nor in the midst of business, nor in the schools of theology; but in the sick chamber, where are no more earthly interests, and in the hour of death, we have before us the living image of the truth of justification by faith, when man acknowledges, on the confines of another world, the unprofitableness of his own good deeds, and the goodness of God even in afflicting him, and his absolute reliance not on works of righteousness that he has done, but on the Divine mercy.

VIII. A true faith has been sometimes defined to be not a faith in the unseen merely, or in God or Christ, but a personal assurance of salvation. Such a feeling may be only the veil of sensualism; it may be also the noble confidence of St. Paul. 'I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' It may be an emotion, resting on no other ground except that we believe; or, a conviction deeply rooted in our life and character. Scripture and reason alike seem to require this belief in our own salvation: and yet to assume that we are at the end of the race may make us lag in our course. Whatever danger there is in the doctrine of the Divine decrees, the danger is nearer home, and more liable to influence practice, when our faith takes the form of personal assurance. How, then, are we to escape from the dilemma, and have a rational confidence in the mercy of God?

IX. This confidence must rest, first, on a sense of the truth and justice of God, rising above perplexities of fact in the world around us, or the tangle of metaphysical or theological difficulties. But although

such a sense of the truth or justice of God is the beginning of our peace, yet a link of connexion is wanting before we can venture to apply to ourselves that which we acknowledge in the abstract. The justice of God may lead to our condemnation as well as to our justification. Are we then, in the language of the ancient tragedy, to say that no one can be counted happy before he dies, or that salvation is only granted when the end of our course is seen? Not so; the Gospel encourages us to regard ourselves as already saved; for we have communion with Christ and appropriate His work by faith. And this appropriation means nothing short of the renunciation of self and the taking up of the cross of Christ in daily life. Whether such an imitation or appropriation of Christ is illusive or real,—a new mould of nature or only an outward and superficial impression, is a question not to be answered by any further theological distinction, but by an honest and good heart searching into itself. Then only, when we surrender ourselves into the hands of God, when we ask Him to show us to ourselves as we truly are, when we allow ourselves in no sin, when we attribute nothing to our own merits, when we test our faith, not by the sincerity of an hour, but of months and years, we learn the true meaning of that word in which, better than any other, the nature of righteousness by faith is summed up,—peace.

‘And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.’ There seems to be a contradiction in love being the ‘greatest’, when faith is the medium of acceptance. Love, according to some, is preferred to faith, because it reaches to another life; when faith and hope are swallowed up in sight, love remains still. Love, according to others, has the first place, because it is



Divine as well as human ; it is the love of God to man, as well as of man to God. Perhaps, the order of precedence is sufficiently explained by the occasion ; to a Church torn by divisions the Apostle says, ‘ that the first of Christian graces is love ’. Another thought, however, is suggested by these words, which has a bearing on our present subject. It is this, that in using the received terms of theology, we must also acknowledge their relative and transient character. Christian truth has many modes of statement ; love is the more natural expression to St. John, faith to St. Paul. The indwelling of Christ or of the Spirit of God, grace, faith, hope, love, are not parts of a system, but powers or aspects of the Christian life. Human minds are different, and the same mind is not the same at different times ; and the best of men nowadays have but a feeble consciousness of spiritual truths. We ought not to dim that consciousness by insisting on a single formula ; and therefore while speaking of faith as the instrument of justification, because faith indicates the apprehensive, dependent character of the believer’s relation to Christ, we are bound also to deny that the Gospel is contained in any word, or the Christian life inseparably linked to any one quality. We must acknowledge the imperfection of language and thought, and seek rather to describe than to define the work of God in the soul, which has as many forms as the tempers, capacities, circumstances, and accidents of our nature.

# ESSAY ON ATONEMENT AND SATISFACTION

‘Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not . . . Then said I, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.’—Ps. xl. 6-8.

THE doctrine of the Atonement has often been explained in a way at which our moral feelings revolt. God is represented as angry with us for what we never did; He is ready to inflict a disproportionate punishment on us for what we are; He is satisfied by the sufferings of His Son in our stead. The sin of Adam is first imputed to us; then the righteousness of Christ. The imperfection of human law is transferred to the Divine; or rather a figment of law which has no real existence. The death of Christ is also explained by the analogy of the ancient rite of sacrifice. He is a victim laid upon the altar to appease the wrath of God. The institutions and ceremonies of the Mosaical religion are applied to Him. He is further said to bear the infinite punishment of infinite sin. When He had suffered or paid the penalty, God is described as granting Him the salvation of mankind in return.

I shall endeavour to show, (1) that these conceptions of the work of Christ have no foundation in Scripture; (2) that their growth may be traced in ecclesiastical history; (3) that the only sacrifice, atonement, or satisfaction, with which the Christian has to do, is a moral and spiritual one; not the pouring out of blood upon the earth, but the living sacrifice ‘to do thy will, O God’; in which the

believer has part as well as his Lord; about the meaning of which there can be no more question in our day than there was in the first ages.

§ 1.

It is difficult to concentrate the authority of Scripture on points of controversy. For Scripture is not doctrine but teaching; it arises naturally out of the circumstances of the writers; it is not intended to meet the intellectual refinements of modern times. The words of our Saviour, 'My kingdom is not of this world', admit of a wide application, to systems of knowledge, as well as to systems of government and politics. The 'bread of life' is not an elaborate theology. The revelation which Scripture makes to us of the will of God, does not turn upon the exact use of language. ('Lo, O man, he hath showed thee what he required of thee; to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.') The books of Scripture were written by different authors, and in different ages of the world; we cannot, therefore, apply them with the minuteness and precision of a legal treatise. The Old Testament is not on all points the same with the New; for 'Moses allowed of some things for the hardness of their hearts'; nor the Law with the Prophets, for there were 'proverbs in the house of Israel' that were reversed; nor does the Gospel, which is simple and universal, in all respects agree with the Epistles which have reference to the particular state of the first converts; nor is the teaching of St. James, who admits works as a coefficient with faith in the justification of man, absolutely identical with that of St. Paul, who asserts righteousness by faith only; nor is the character of all the Epistles of St. Paul, written as they were at different times amid the changing scenes of life,



precisely the same; nor does he himself claim an equal authority for all his precepts. No theory of inspiration can obliterate these differences; or rather none can be true which does not admit them. The neglect of them reduces the books of Scripture to an unmeaning unity, and effectually seals up their true sense. But if we acknowledge this natural diversity of form, this perfect humanity of Scripture, we must, at any rate in some general way, adjust the relation of the different parts to one another before we apply its words to the establishment of any doctrine.

Nor again is the citation of a single text sufficient to prove a doctrine; nor must consequences be added on, which are not found in Scripture, nor figures of speech reasoned about, as though they conveyed exact notions. An accidental similarity of expression is not to be admitted as an authority; nor a mystical allusion, which has been gathered from Scripture, according to some method which in other writings the laws of language and logic would not justify. When engaged in controversy with Roman Catholics, about the doctrine of purgatory, or transubstantiation, or the authority of the successors of St. Peter, we are willing to admit these principles. They are equally true when the subject of inquiry is the atoning work of Christ. We must also distinguish the application of a passage in religious discourse from its original meaning. The more obvious explanation which is received in our own day, or by our own branch of the Church, will sometimes have to be set aside for one more difficult, because less familiar, which is drawn from the context. Nor is it allowable to bar an interpretation of Scripture from a regard to doctrinal consequences. Further, it is necessary that we should make allow-

ance for the manner in which ideas were represented in the ages at which the books of Scripture were written which cannot be so lively to us as to contemporaries. Nor can we deny that texts may be quoted on both sides of a controversy, as for example, in the controversy respecting predestination. For in religious, as in other differences, there is often truth on both sides.

The drift of the preceding remarks is not to show that there is any ambiguity or uncertainty in the witness of Scripture to the great truths of morality and religion. Nay, rather the universal voice of the Old Testament and the New proclaims that there is one God of infinite justice, goodness, and truth: and the writers of the New Testament agree in declaring that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Saviour of the world. There can never, by any possibility, be a doubt that our Lord and St. Paul taught the doctrine of a future life, and of a judgment, at which men would give an account of the deeds done in the body. It is no matter for regret that the essentials of the Gospel are within the reach of a child's understanding. But this clearness of Scripture about the great truths of religion does not extend to the distinctions and developments of theological systems; it rather seems to contrast with them. It is one thing to say that 'Christ is the Saviour of the world', or that 'we are reconciled to God through Christ', and another thing to affirm that the Levitical or heathen sacrifices typified the death of Christ; or that the death of Christ has a sacrificial import, and is an atonement or satisfaction for the sins of men. The latter positions involve great moral and intellectual difficulties; many things have to be considered, before we can allow that the phraseology of Scripture is to be

caught up and applied in this way. For we may easily dress up in the externals of the New Testament a doctrine which is really at variance with the Spirit of Christ and His Apostles, and we may impart to this doctrine, by the help of living tradition, that is to say, custom and religious use, a sacredness yet greater than is derived from such a fallacious application of Scripture language. It happens almost unavoidably (and our only chance of guarding against the illusion is to be aware of it) that we are more under the influence of rhetoric in theology than in other branches of knowledge; our minds are so constituted that what we often hear we are ready to believe, especially when it falls in with previous convictions or wants. But he who desires to know whether the statements above referred to have any real objective foundation in the New Testament, will carefully weigh the following considerations:— Whether there is any reason for interpreting the New Testament by the analogy of the Old? Whether the sacrificial expressions which occur in the New Testament, and on which the question chiefly turns, are to be interpreted spiritually or literally? Whether the use of such expressions may not be a figurative mode of the time, which did not necessarily recall the thing signified any more than the popular use of the term ‘Sacrifice’ among ourselves? He will consider further whether this language is employed vaguely, or definitely? Whether it is the chief manner of expressing the work of Christ, or one among many? Whether it is found to occur equally in every part of the New Testament; for example, in the Gospels, as well as in the Epistles? Whether the more frequent occurrence of it in particular books, as for instance, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, may not be explained by the peculiar object or



circumstances of the writer? Whether other figures of speech, such as death, life, resurrection with Christ, are not equally frequent, which have never yet been made the foundation of any doctrine? Lastly, whether this language of sacrifice is not applied to the believer as well as to his Lord, and whether the believer is not spoken of as sharing the sufferings of his Lord?

I. All Christians agree that there is a connexion between the Old Testament and the New: 'Novum Testamentum in vetere latet; Vetus Testamentum in novo patet': 'I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil.' But, respecting the nature of the revelation or fulfilment which is implied in these expressions, they are not equally agreed. Some conceive the Old and New Testaments to be 'double one against the other'; the one being the type, and the other the antitype, the ceremonies of the Law, and the symbols and imagery of the Prophets, supplying to them the forms of thought and religious ideas of the Gospel. Even the history of the Jewish people has been sometimes thought to be an anticipation or parallel of the history of the Christian world; many accidental circumstances in the narrative of Scripture being likewise taken as an example of the Christian life. The relation between the Old and New Testaments has been regarded by others from a different point of view, as a continuous one, which may be described under some image of growth or development; the facts and ideas of the one leading on to the facts and ideas of the other; and the two together forming one record of 'the increasing purpose which through the ages ran'. This continuity, however, is broken at one point, and the parts separate and reunite like ancient and modern civilization, though the connexion is nearer,

and of another kind; the Messiah, in whom the hopes of the Jewish people centre, being the first-born of a new creation, the Son of Man and the Son of God. It is necessary, moreover, to distinguish the connexion of fact from that of language and idea; because the Old Testament is not only the preparation for the New, but also the figure and expression of it. Those who hold the first of these two views, viz. the reduplication of the Old Testament in the New, rest their opinion chiefly on two grounds. First, it seems incredible to them, and repugnant to their conception of a Divine revelation, that the great apparatus of rites and ceremonies, with which, even at this distance of time, they are intimately acquainted, should have no inner and symbolical meaning; that the Jewish nation for many ages should have carried with it a load of forms only; that the words of Moses which they 'still hear read in the synagogue every Sabbath-Day', and which they often read in their own households, should relate only to matters of outward observance; just as they are unwilling to believe that the prophecies, which they also read, have no reference to the historical events of modern times. And, secondly, they are swayed by the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer of which has made the Old Testament the allegory of the New.

It will be considered hereafter what is to be said in answer to the last of these arguments. The first is perhaps sufficiently answered by the analogy of other ancient religions. It would be ridiculous to assume a spiritual meaning in the Homeric rites and sacrifices; although they may be different in other respects, have we any more reason for inferring such a meaning in the Mosaic? Admitting the application which is made of a few of them by the author of

the Epistle to the Hebrews to be their original intention, the great mass would still remain unexplained, and yet they are all alike contained in the same Revelation. It may seem natural to us to suppose that God taught His people like children by the help of outward objects. But no *a priori* supposition of this kind, no fancy, however natural, of a symmetry or coincidence which may be traced between the Old Testament and the New, nor the frequent repetition of such a theory in many forms, is an answer to the fact. That fact is the silence of the Old Testament itself. If the sacrifices of the Mosaical religion were really symbolical of the death of Christ, how can it be accounted for that no trace of this symbolism appears in the books of Moses themselves? that prophets and righteous men of old never gave this interpretation to them? that the lawgiver is intent only on the sign, and says nothing of the thing signified? No other book is ever supposed to teach truths about which it is wholly silent. We do not imagine the Iliad and Odyssey to be a revelation of the Platonic or Socratic philosophy. The circumstance that these poems received this or some other allegorical explanation from a school of Alexandrian critics, does not incline us to believe that such an explanation is a part of their original meaning. The human mind does not work in this occult manner; language was not really given men to conceal their thoughts; plain precepts or statements do not contain hidden mysteries.

It may be said that the Levitical rites and offerings had a meaning, not for the Jews, but for us, 'on whom the ends of the world are come'. Moses, David, Isaiah were unacquainted with this meaning; it was reserved for those who lived after the event to which they referred had taken place to discover it.



Such an afterthought may be natural to us, who are ever tracing a literary or mystical connexion between the Old Testament and the New; it would have been very strange to us, had we lived in the ages before the coming of Christ. It is incredible that God should have instituted rites and ceremonies, which were to be observed as forms by a whole people throughout their history, to teach mankind fifteen hundred years afterwards, uncertainly and in a figure, a lesson which Christ taught plainly and without a figure. Such an assumption confuses the application of Scripture with its original meaning; the use of language in the New Testament with the facts of the Old. Further, it does away with all certainty in the interpretation of Scripture. If we can introduce the New Testament into the Old, we may with equal right introduce Tradition or Church History into the New.

The question here raised has a very important bearing on the use of the figures of atonement and sacrifice in the New Testament. For if it could be shown that the sacrifices which were offered up in the Levitical worship were anticipatory only; that the law too declared itself to be 'a shadow of good things to come'; that Moses had himself spoken 'of the reproach of Christ'; in that case the slightest allusion in the New Testament to the customs or words of the law would have a peculiar interest. We should be justified in referring to them as explanatory of the work of Christ, in studying the Levitical distinctions respecting offerings with a more than antiquarian interest, in 'disputing about purifying' and modes of expiation. But if not; if, in short, we are only reflecting the present on the past, or perhaps confusing both together, and interpreting Christianity by Judaism, and Judaism

by Christianity ; then the sacrificial language of the New Testament loses its depth and significance, or rather acquires a higher, that is, a spiritual one.

II. Of such an explanation, if it had really existed when the Mosaic religion was still a national form of worship, traces would occur in the writings of the Psalmists and the Prophets ; for these furnish a connecting link between the Old Testament and the New. But this is not the case ; the Prophets are, for the most part, unconscious of the law, or silent respecting its obligations.

In many places, their independence of the Mosaic religion passes into a kind of opposition to it. The inward and spiritual truth asserts itself, not as an explanation of the ceremonial observance, but in defiance of it. The 'undergrowth of morality' is putting forth shoots in spite of the deadness of the ceremonial hull. Isaiah i. 13 : 'Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.' Micah vi. 6 : 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, or bow myself before the high God ? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ?' Psalm l. 10 : 'All the beasts of the forests are mine, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills : If I were hungry I would not tell thee.' We cannot doubt that in passages like these we are bursting the bonds of the Levitical or ceremonial dispensation.

The spirit of prophecy, speaking by Isaiah, does not say 'I will have mercy as well as sacrifice', but 'I will have mercy and not (or rather than) sacrifice'. In the words of the Psalmist, 'Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not ; then said I, Lo, I come to do

thy will, O God'; 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit': or again, 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgement unto truth': or again, according to the image both of Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. liii. 7; Jer. xi. 19), which seems to have passed before the vision of John the Baptist (John i. 36), 'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb'. These are the points at which the Old and New Testaments most nearly touch, the (τύποι) types or ensamples of the one which we find in the other, the pre-notions or preparations with which we pass from Moses and the Prophets to the Gospel of Christ.

III. It is hard to imagine that there can be any truer expression of the Gospel than the words of Christ himself, or that any truth omitted by Him is essential to the Gospel. 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant greater than his lord.' The philosophy of Plato was not better understood by his followers than by himself, nor can we allow that the Gospel is to be interpreted by the Epistles, or that the Sermon on the Mount is only half Christian and needs the fuller inspiration or revelation of St. Paul or the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There is no trace in the words of our Saviour of any omission or imperfection; there is no indication in the Epistles of any intention to complete or perfect them. How strange would it have seemed in the Apostle St. Paul, who thought himself unworthy 'to be called an Apostle because he persecuted the Church of God', to find that his own words were preferred in after ages to those of Christ himself!

There is no study of theology which is likely to



exercise a more elevating influence on the individual, or a more healing one on divisions of opinion, than the study of the words of Christ himself. The heart is its own witness to them; all Christian sects acknowledge them; they seem to escape or rise above the region or atmosphere of controversy. The form in which they exhibit the Gospel to us is the simplest and also the deepest; they are more free from details than any other part of Scripture, and they are absolutely independent of personal and national influences. In them is contained the expression of the inner life, of mankind, and of the Church; there, too, the individual beholds, as in a glass, the image of a goodness which is not of this world. To rank their authority below that of Apostles and Evangelists is to give up the best hope of reuniting Christendom in itself, and of making Christianity a universal religion.

And Christ himself hardly even in a figure uses the word 'sacrifice'; never with the least reference to His own life or death. There are many ways in which our Lord describes His relation to His Father and to mankind. His disciples are to be one with Him, even as He is one with the Father; whatsoever things He seeth the Father do He doeth. He says, 'I am the resurrection and the life'; or, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'; and, 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me'; and again, 'Whatsoever things ye shall ask in my name shall be given you'; and once again, 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter'. Most of His words are simple, like 'a man talking to his friends'; and their impressiveness and beauty partly flow from this simplicity. He speaks of His 'decease too which he should accomplish at Jerusalem', but not in sacrificial language. 'And now I go my way to him that

sent me'; and 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. Once indeed He says, 'The bread that I give is my flesh, which I give for the salvation of the world'; to which He himself adds, 'The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are truth', a commentary which should be applied not only to these but to all other figurative expressions which occur in the New Testament. In the words of institution of the Lord's supper, He also speaks of His death as in some way connected with the remission of sins. But among all the figures of speech under which He describes His work in the world,—the vine, the good shepherd, the door, the light of the world, the bread of life, the water of life, the corner stone, the temple,—none contains any sacrificial allusion.

The parables of Christ have a natural and ethical character. They are only esoteric in as far as the hardness or worldliness of men's hearts prevents their understanding or receiving them. There is a danger of our making them mean too much rather than too little, that is, of winning a false interest for them by applying them mystically or taking them as a thesis for dialectical or rhetorical exercise. For example, if we say that the guest who came to the marriage supper without a wedding-garment represents a person clothed in his own righteousness instead of the righteousness of Christ, that is an explanation of which there is not a trace in the words of the parable itself. That is an illustration of the manner in which we are not to gather doctrines from Scripture. For there is nothing which we may not in this way superinduce on the plainest lessons of our Saviour.

Reading the parables, then, simply and naturally, we find in them no indication of the doctrine of atonement or satisfaction. They form a very large

portion of the sayings which have been recorded of our Saviour while He was on earth; and they teach a great number of separate lessons. But there is no hint contained in them of that view of the death of Christ which is sometimes regarded as the centre of the Gospel. There is no 'difficulty in the nature of things' which prevents the father going out to meet the prodigal son. No other condition is required of the justification of the publican except the true sense of his own unworthiness. The work of those labourers who toiled for one hour only in the vineyard is not supplemented by the merits and deserts of another. The reward for the cup of cold water is not denied to those who are unaware that He to whom it is given is the Lord. The parables of the Good Samaritan, of the Fig-tree, of the Talents, do not recognize the distinction of faith and works. Other sayings and doings of our Lord while He was on earth imply the same unconsciousness or neglect of the refinements of later ages. The power of the Son of Man to forgive sins is not dependent on the satisfaction which He is to offer for them. The Sermon on the Mount, which is the extension of the law to thought as well as action, and the two great commandments in which the law is summed up, are equally the expression of the Gospel. The mind of Christ is in its own place, far away from the oppositions of modern theology. Like that of the prophets, His relation to the law of Moses is one of neutrality; He has another lesson to teach which comes immediately from God. 'The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat—' or, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts,—' or, 'Which of you hath an ox or an ass,—' or, 'Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within'. He does not say, 'Behold in me the true



Sacrifice'; or, 'I that speak unto you am the victim and priest'. He has nothing to do with legal and ceremonial observances. There is a sort of natural irony with which He regards the world around Him. It was as though He would not have touched the least of the Levitical commandments; and yet 'not one stone was to be left upon another' as the indirect effect of His teaching. So that it would be equally true: 'I am not come to destroy the law but to fulfil'; and 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again'. 'My kingdom is not of this world', yet it shall subdue the kingdoms of this world; and, the Prince of Peace will not 'bring peace on earth, but a sword'.

There is a mystery in the life and death of Christ; that is to say, there is more than we know or are perhaps capable of knowing. The relation in which He stood both to His Father and to mankind is imperfectly revealed to us; we do not fully understand what may be termed in a figure His inner mind or consciousness. Expressions occur which are like flashes of this inner self, and seem to come from another world. There are also mixed modes which blend earth and heaven. There are circumstances in our Lord's life, too, of a similar nature, such as the transfiguration, or the agony in the garden, of which the Scripture records only the outward fact. Least of all do we pretend to fathom the import of His death. He died for us, in the language of the Gospels, in the same sense that He lived for us; He 'bore our sins' in the same sense that He 'bore our diseases' (Matt. viii. 17). He died by the hands of sinners as a malefactor, the innocent for the guilty, Jesus instead of Barabbas, because it was necessary 'that one man should die for that nation, and not for that nation only'; as a righteous man laying

down his life for his friends, as a hero to save his country, as a martyr to bear witness to the truth. He died as the Son of God, free to lay down His life; confident that He would have power to take it again. More than this is meant; and more than human speech can tell. But we do not fill up the void of our knowledge by drawing out figures of speech into consequences at variance with the attributes of God. No external mode of describing or picturing the work of Christ realizes its inward nature. Neither will the reproduction of our own feelings in a doctrinal form supply any objective support or ground of the Christian faith.

IV. Two of the General Epistles and two of the Epistles of St. Paul have no bearing on our present subject. These are the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude, and the two Epistles to the Thessalonians. Their silence, like that of the Gospels, is at least a negative proof that the doctrine of Sacrifice or Satisfaction is not a central truth of Christianity. The remainder of the New Testament will be sufficiently considered under two heads: first, the remaining Epistles of St. Paul; and, secondly, the Epistle to the Hebrews. The difficulties which arise respecting these are the same as the difficulties which apply in a less degree to one or two passages in the Epistles of St. Peter and St. John, and in the book of Revelation.

It is not to be denied that the language of Sacrifice and Substitution occurs in the Epistles of St. Paul. Instances of the former are furnished by Rom. iii. 23, 25; 1 Cor. v. 7: of the latter by Gal. ii. 20; iii. 13.

Rom. iii. 23-25: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ

Jesus : whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith by his blood, to declare his righteousness.'

1 Cor. v. 7 : 'Christ our passover is sacrificed [for us]; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.'

These two passages are a fair example of a few others. About the translation and explanation of the first of them interpreters differ. But the differences are not such as to affect our present question. For that question is a general one, viz. whether these, and similar sacrificial expressions, are passing figures of speech, or appointed signs or symbols of the death of Christ. On which it may be observed:—

First : That these expressions are not the peculiar or characteristic modes in which the Apostle describes the relation of the believer to his Lord. For one instance of the use of sacrificial language, five or six might be cited of the language of identity or communion, in which the believer is described as one with his Lord in all the stages of His life and death. But this language is really inconsistent with the other. For if Christ is one with the believer, He cannot be regarded strictly as a victim who takes his place. And the stage of Christ's being which coincides, and is specially connected by the Apostle, with the justification of man, is not His death, but His resurrection (Rom. iv. 25).

Secondly : These sacrificial expressions, as also the vicarious ones of which we shall hereafter speak, belong to the religious language of the age. They are found in Philo; and the Old Testament itself had already given them a spiritual or figurative application. There is no more reason to suppose



that the word 'sacrifice' suggested the actual rite in the Apostolic age than in our own. It was a solemn religious idea, not a fact. The Apostles at Jerusalem saw the smoke of the daily sacrifice; the Apostle St. Paul beheld victims blazing on many altars in heathen cities (he regarded them as the tables of devils). But there is no reason to suppose that they led him to think of Christ, or that the bleeding form on the altar suggested the sufferings of his Lord.

Therefore, thirdly, We shall only be led into error by attempting to explain the application of the word to Christ from the original meaning of the thing. That is a question of Jewish or classical archaeology, which would receive a different answer in different ages and countries. Many motives or instincts may be traced in the worship of the first children of men. The need of giving or getting rid of something; the desire to fulfil an obligation or expiate a crime; the consecration of a part that the rest may be holy; the Homeric feast of gods and men, of the living with the dead; the mystery of animal nature, of which the blood was the symbol; the substitution, in a few instances, of the less for the greater; in later ages, custom adhering to the old rituals when the meaning of them has passed away;—these seem to be true explanations of the ancient sacrifices. (Human sacrifices, such as those of the old Mexican peoples, or the traditional ones in prehistoric Greece, may be left out of consideration, as they appear to spring from such monstrous and cruel perversion of human nature.) But these explanations have nothing to do with our present subject. We may throw an imaginary light back upon them (for it is always easier to represent former ages like our own than to realize them as they truly were); they will not assist us in comprehending the import of the death of

Christ, or the nature of the Christian religion. They are in the highest degree opposed to it, at the other end of the scale of human development, as 'the weak and beggarly elements' of sense and fear to the spirit whereby we cry, Abba, Father; almost, may we not say, as the instinct of animals to the reasoning faculties of man. For sacrifice is not, like prayer, one of the highest, but one of the lowest acts of religious worship. It is the antiquity, not the religious import of the rite, which first gave it a sacredness. In modern times, the associations which are conveyed by the word are as far from the original idea as those of the cross itself. The death of Christ is not a sacrifice in the ancient sense (any more than the cross is to Christians the symbol of infamy); but what we mean by the word 'sacrifice' is the death of Christ.

Fourthly: This sacrificial language is not used with any definiteness or precision. The figure varies in different passages; Christ is the Paschal Lamb, or the Lamb without spot, as well as the sin-offering; the priest as well as the sacrifice. It is applied not only to Christ, but to the believer who is to present his body a living sacrifice; and the offering of which St. Paul speaks in one passage is 'the offering up of the Gentiles'. Again, this language is everywhere broken by moral and spiritual applications into which it dissolves and melts away. When we read of 'sacrifice', or 'purification', or 'redemption', these words isolated may for an instant carry our thoughts back to the Levitical ritual. But when we restore them to their context,—a sacrifice which is a 'spiritual sacrifice', or a 'spiritual and mental service', a purification which is a 'purging from dead works to serve the living God', a redemption 'by the blood of Christ from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers',—we

see that the association offers no real help; it is no paradox to say that we should rather forget than remember it. All this tends to show that these figures of speech are not the eternal symbols of the Christian faith, but shadows only which lightly come and go, and ought not to be fixed by definitions, or made the foundation of doctrinal systems.

Fifthly: Nor is any such use of them made by any of the writers of the New Testament. It is true that St. Paul occasionally, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews much more frequently, use sacrificial language. But they do not pursue the figure into details or consequences; they do not draw it out in logical form. Still less do they inquire, as modern theologians have done, into the objective or transcendental relation in which the sacrifice of Christ stood to the will of the Father. St. Paul says, 'We thus judge that if one died, then all died, and He died for all, that they which live shall not henceforth live to themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again'. But words like these are far indeed from expressing a doctrine of atonement or satisfaction.

Lastly: The extent to which the Apostle employs figurative language in general, may be taken as a measure of the force of the figure in particular, expressions. Now there is no mode of speaking of spiritual things more natural to him than the image of death. Of the meaning of this word, in all languages, it may be said that there can be no doubt. Yet no one supposes that the sense which the Apostle gives to it is other than a spiritual one. The reason is, that the word has never been made the foundation of any doctrine. But the circumstance that the term 'sacrifice' has passed into the language of theology, does not really circumscribe or define it.



It is a figure of speech still, which is no more to be interpreted by the Mosaic sacrifices than spiritual death by physical. Let us consider again other expressions of St. Paul: 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' 'Who hath taken the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, and nailed it to His cross.' 'Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body's sake, which is the church.' The occurrence of these and many similar expressions is a sufficient indication that the writer in whom they occur is not to be interpreted in a dry or literal manner.

Another class of expressions, which may be termed the language of substitution or vicarious suffering, are also occasionally found in St. Paul. Two examples of them, both of which occur in the Epistle to the Galatians, will indicate their general character.

Gal. ii. 20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' iii. 13: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.'

This use of language seems to originate in what was termed before the language of identity. First, 'I am crucified with Christ', and secondly, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in me'. The believer, according to St. Paul, follows Christ until he becomes like Him. And this likeness is so complete and entire, that all that he was or might have been is attributed to Christ, and all that Christ is, is attributed to him. With such life and fervour does St. Paul paint the intimacy of the union between the believer and Christ: They two are 'One Spirit'. To build on such expressions a doctrinal system is the error of 'rhetoric turned logic'. The truth of feeling which

is experienced by a few is not to be handed over to the head as a form of doctrine for the many.

The same remark applies to another class of passages, in which Christ is described as dying 'for us', or 'for our sins'. Upon which it may be further observed, first, that in these passages the preposition used is not *ἀντί* but *ὑπέρ*; and, secondly, that Christ is spoken of as living and rising again, as well as dying, for us; whence we infer that He died for us in the same sense that He lived for us. Of what is meant, perhaps the nearest conception we can form is furnished by the example of a good man taking upon himself, or, as we say, identifying himself with, the troubles and sorrows of others. Christ himself has sanctioned the comparison of a love which lays down life for a friend. Let us think of one as sensitive to moral evil as the gentlest of mankind to physical suffering; of one whose love identified him with the whole human race as strongly as the souls of men are ever knit together by individual affections.

Many of the preceding observations apply equally to the Epistle to the Hebrews and to the Epistles of St. Paul. But the Epistle to the Hebrews has features peculiar to itself. It is a more complete transfiguration of the law, which St. Paul, on the other hand, applies by way of illustration, and in fragments only. It has the interest of an allegory, and, in some respects, admits of a comparison with the book of Revelation. It is full of sacrificial allusions, derived, however, not from the actual rite, but from the description of it in the books of Moses. Probably at Jerusalem, or the vicinity of the actual temple, it would not have been written.

From this source chiefly, and not from the Epistles of St. Paul, the language of sacrifice has passed into

the theology and sermons of modern times. The Epistle to the Hebrews affords a greater apparent foundation for the popular or Calvinistical doctrines of atonement and satisfaction, but not perhaps a greater real one. For it is not the mere use of the terms 'sacrifice' or 'blood', but the sense in which they were used, that must be considered. It is a fallacy, though a natural one, to confuse the image with the thing signified, like mistaking the colour of a substance for its true nature.

Long passages might be quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which describe the work of Christ in sacrificial language. Some of the most striking verses are the following:—ix. 11–14: 'Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.' x. 12: 'This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God.'

That these and similar passages have only a deceitful resemblance to the language of those theologians who regard the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ as the central truth of the Gospel, is manifest from the following considerations:—

1. The great number and variety of the figures. Christ is Joshua, who gives the people rest (iv. 8);



Melchisedec, to whom Abraham paid tithes (v. 6, vii. 6); the high priest going into the most holy place after he had offered sacrifice, which sacrifice He himself is, passing through the veil, which is His flesh.

2. The inconsistency of the figures: an inconsistency partly arising from their ceasing to be figures and passing into moral notions, as in chap. ix. 14: 'the blood of Christ, who offered himself without spot to God, shall purge your conscience from dead works'; partly from the confusion of two or more figures, as in the verse following: 'And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament,' where the idea of sacrifice forms a transition to that of death and a testament, and the idea of a testament blends with that of a covenant.

3. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews dwells on the outward circumstance of the shedding of the blood of Christ. St. Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians makes another application of the Old Testament, describing our Lord as enduring the curse which befell 'One who hanged on a tree'. Imagine for an instant that this latter had been literally the mode of our Lord's death. The figure of the Epistle to the Hebrews would cease to have any meaning; yet no one supposes that there would have been any essential difference in the work of Christ.

4. The atoning sacrifice of which modern theology speaks, is said to be the great object of faith. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews also speaks of faith, but no such expression as faith in the blood, or sacrifice, or death of Christ is made use of by him, or is found anywhere else in Scripture. The faith of the patriarchs is not faith in the peculiar sense of the term, but the faith of those who confess

that they are ‘strangers and pilgrims’, and ‘endure seeing him that is invisible’.

Lastly: The Jewish Alexandrian character of the Epistle must be admitted as an element of the inquiry. It interprets the Old Testament after a manner then current in the world, which we must either continue to apply or admit that it was relative to that age and country. It makes statements which we can only accept in a figure, as, for example, in chap. xi, ‘that Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt’. It uses language in double senses, as, for instance, the two meanings of *διαθήκη* and of *ἡ πρώτη* in chap. viii. 13; ix. 1; and the connexion which it establishes between the Old Testament and the New, is a verbal or mystical one, not a connexion between the temple and offerings at Jerusalem and the offering up of Christ, but between the ancient ritual and the tabernacle described in the book of the law.

Such were the instruments which the author of this great Epistle (whoever he may have been) employed, after the manner of his age and country, to impart the truths of the Gospel in a figure to those who esteemed this sort of figurative knowledge as a kind of perfection (Heb. vi. 1). ‘Ideas must be given through something’; nor could mankind in those days, any more than our own, receive the truth except in modes of thought that were natural to them. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is writing to those who lived and moved in the atmosphere, as it may be termed, of Alexandrian Judaism. Therefore he uses the figures of the law, but he also guards against their literal acceptance. Christ is a priest, but a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec; He is a sacrifice, but He is also the end of sacrifices, and the sacrifice which He offers

is the negation of sacrifices, 'to do thy will, O God'. Everywhere he has a 'how much more', 'how much greater', for the new dispensation in comparison with the old. He raises the Old Testament to the New, first by drawing forth the spirit of the New Testament from the Old, and secondly by applying the words of the Old Testament in a higher sense than they at first had. The former of these two methods of interpretation is moral and universal, the latter local and temporary. But if we who are not Jews like the persons to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews is addressed, and who are taught by education to receive words in their natural and *prima facie* meaning, linger around the figure instead of looking forward to the thing signified, we do indeed make 'Christ the minister' of the Mosaic religion. For there is a Judaism not only of outward ceremonies or ecclesiastical hierarchies, or temporal rewards and punishments, but of ideas also, which impedes the worship of spirit and truth.

The sum of what has been said is as follows:—

Firstly: That our Lord never describes His own work in the language of atonement or sacrifice.

Secondly: That this language is a figure of speech borrowed from the Old Testament, yet not to be explained by the analogy of the Levitical sacrifices; occasionally found in the writings of St. Paul; more frequently in the Epistle to the Hebrews; applied to the believer at least equally with his Lord, and indicating by the variety and uncertainty with which it is used that it is not the expression of any objective relation in which the work of Christ stands to His Father, but only a mode of speaking common at a time when the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law were passing away and beginning to receive a spiritual meaning.



Thirdly: That nothing is signified by this language, or at least nothing essential, beyond what is implied in the teaching of our Lord himself. For it cannot be supposed that there is any truer account of Christianity than is to be found in the words of Christ.

## § 2.

Theology sprang up in the first ages independently of Scripture. This independence continued afterwards; it has never been wholly lost. There is a tradition of the nineteenth century, as well as of the fourth or fourteenth, which comes between them. The mystical interpretation of Scripture has further parted them; to which may be added the power of system: doctrines when framed into a whole cease to draw their inspiration from the text. Logic has expressed 'the thoughts of many hearts' with a seeming necessity of form; this form of reasoning has led to new inferences. Many words and formulas have also acquired a sacredness from their occurrence in liturgies and articles, or the frequent use of them in religious discourse. The true interest of the theologian is to restore these formulas to their connexion in Scripture, and to their place in ecclesiastical history. The standard of Christian truth is not a logical clearness or sequence, but the simplicity of the mind of Christ.

The history of theology is the history of the intellectual life of the Christian Church. All bodies of Christians, Protestant as well as Catholic, have tended to imagine that they are in the same stage of religious development as the first believers. But the Church has not stood still any more than the world; we may trace the progress of doctrine as well as the growth of philosophical opinion. The

thoughts of men do not pass away without leaving an impress, in religion, any more than in politics or literature. The form of more than one article of faith in our own day is assignable to the effort of mind of some great thinker of the Nicene or mediæval times. The received interpretation of texts of Scripture may not unfrequently be referred to the application of them first made in periods of controversy. Neither is it possible in any reformation of the Church to return exactly to the point whence the divergence began. The pattern of Apostolical order may be restored in externals; but the threads of the dialectical process are in the mind itself, and cannot be disposed of at once. It seems to be the nature of theology that while it is easy to add one definition of doctrine to another, it is hard to withdraw from any which have been once received. To believe too much is held to be safer than to believe too little, and the human intellect finds a more natural exercise in raising the superstructure than in examining the foundations. On the other hand, it is instructive to observe that there has always been an undercurrent in theology, the course of which has turned towards morality, and not away from it. There is a higher sense of truth and right now than in the Nicene Church—after than before the Reformation. The laity in all Churches have moderated the extremes of the clergy. There may also be remarked a silent correction in men's minds of statements which have not ceased to appear in theological writings.

The study of the doctrinal development of the Christian Church has many uses. First, it helps us to separate the history of a doctrine from its truth, and indirectly also the meaning of Scripture from the new reading of it, which has been given in many

instances by theological controversy. It takes us away from the passing movement, and out of our own particular corner into a world in which we see religion on a larger scale and in truer proportions. It enables us to interpret one age to another, to understand our present theological position by its antecedents in the past; and perhaps to bind all together in the spirit of charity. Half the intolerance of opinion among Christians arises from ignorance; in history as in life, when we know others we get to like them. Logic too ceases to take us by force and make us believe. There is a pathetic interest and a kind of mystery in the long continuance and intensity of erroneous ideas on behalf of which men have been ready to die, which nevertheless were no better than the dreams or fancies of children. When we make allowance for differences in modes of thought, for the state of knowledge, and the conditions of the ecclesiastical society, we see that individuals have not been altogether responsible for their opinions; that the world has been bound together under the influence of the past; moreover, good men of all persuasions have been probably nearer to one another than they supposed, in doctrine as well as in life. It is the attempt to preserve or revive erroneous opinions in the present age, not their existence in former ages, that is to be reprobated. Lastly, the study of the history of doctrine is the end of controversy. For it is above controversy, of which it traces the growth, clearing away that part which is verbal only, and teaching us to understand that other part which is fixed in the deeper differences of human nature.

The history of the doctrine of the atonement may be conveniently divided into four periods of unequal length, each of which is marked by some peculiar



features. First, the Patristic period, extending to the time of Anselm, in which the doctrine had not attained to a perfect or complete form, but each one applied for himself the language of Scripture. Secondly, the Scholastic period, beginning with Anselm, who may be said to have defined anew the conceptions of the Christian world respecting the work of Christ, and including the great schoolmen who were his successors. Thirdly, the century of the Reformation, embracing what may be termed the after-thoughts of Protestantism, when men began to reason in that new sphere of religious thought which had been called into existence in the great struggle. 'Fragments of the great banquet' of the schoolmen survive throughout the period, and have floated down the stream of time to our own age. Fourthly, the last hundred years, during which the doctrine of the atonement has received a new development from the influences of German philosophy<sup>1</sup>, as well as from the speculations of English and American writers.

1. The characteristics of the first period may be summed up as follows. All the Fathers agreed that man was reconciled to God through Christ, and received in the Gospel a new and divine life. Most of them also spoke of the death of Christ as a ransom or sacrifice. When we remember that in the first age of the Church the New Testament was exclusively taught through the Old, and that many of the first teachers, who were unacquainted with our present Gospels, had passed their lives in the study of the Old Testament Scriptures, we shall not wonder at the early diffusion of this sort of language. Almost every application of the types of the law which has

<sup>1</sup> In the following pages I have derived great assistance from the excellent work of Baur über die Versöhnungslehre.

been made since, is already found in the writings of Justin Martyr. Nor indeed, on general grounds, is there any reason why we should feel surprise at such a tendency in the first ages. For in all Churches, and at all times of the world's history, the Old Testament has tended to take the place of the New; the law of the Gospel;—the handmaid has become the mistress;—and the development of the Christian priesthood has developed also the idea of a Christian sacrifice.

The peculiarity of the primitive doctrine did not lie here, but in the relation in which the work of Christ was supposed to stand to the powers of evil. In the first ages we are beset with shadows of an underworld, which hover on the confines of Christianity. From Origen downwards, with some traces of an earlier opinion of the same kind, perhaps of Gnostic origin, it was a prevailing though not quite universal belief among the Fathers, that the death of Christ was a satisfaction, not to God, but to the devil. Man, by having sinned, passed into the power of the evil one, who acquired a real right over him which could not be taken away without compensation. Christ offered himself as this compensation, which the devil eagerly accepted, as worth more than all mankind. But the deceiver was in turn deceived; thinking to triumph over the humanity, he was himself triumphed over by the Divinity of Christ. This theory was characteristically expressed under some such image as the following: 'that the devil snatching at the bait of human flesh, was hooked by the Divine nature, and forced to disgorge what he had already swallowed.' It is common in some form to Origen, Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, and much later writers; and there are indications of it

in Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* v. i. 1). The meaning of this transaction with the devil it is hardly possible to explain consistently. For a real possession of the soul of Christ was not thought of; an imaginary one is only an illusion. In either case the absolute right which is assigned to the devil over man, and which requires this satisfaction, is as repugnant to our moral and religious ideas, as the notion that the right could be satisfied by a deception. This strange fancy seems to be a reflection or anticipation of Manicheism within the Church. The world, which had been hitherto a kingdom of evil, of which the devil was the lord, was to be exorcised and taken out of his power by the death of Christ.

But the mythical fancy of the transaction with the devil was not the whole, nor even the leading conception, which the Fathers had of the import of the death of Christ. It was the negative, not the positive, side of the doctrine of redemption which they thus expressed; nobler thoughts also filled their minds. Origen regards the death of Christ as a payment to the devil, yet also as an offering to God; this offering took place not on earth only, but also in heaven; God is the high priest who offered. Another aspect of the doctrine of the atonement is presented by the same Father, under the Neo-Platonist form of the *λόγος* (word), who reunites with God, not only man, but all intelligences. Irenaeus speaks, in language more human and more like St. Paul, of Christ 'coming to save all, and therefore passing through all the ages of man; becoming an infant among infants, a little one among little ones, a young man among young men, an elder with the aged (?), that each in turn might be sanctified, until He reached death, that He should be the first-born from the dead' (ii. 22, 147). The



great Latin Father, though he believed equally with Origen in the right and power of the devil over man, delights also to bring forward the moral aspect of the work of Christ. 'The entire life of Christ,' he says, 'was an instruction in morals.' (*De Ver. Rel.* c. 16.) 'He died in order that no man might be afraid of death.' (*De Fide et Symbolo*, c. 5.) 'The love which He displayed in his death constrains us to love Him and each other in return.' (*De Cat. Rud.* c. 4.) Like St. Paul, Augustine contrasts the second Adam with the first, the man of righteousness with the man of sin (*De Ver. Relig.* c. 26). Lastly, he places the real nature of redemption in the manifestation of the God-man.

Another connexion between ancient and modern theology is supplied by the writings of Athanasius. The view taken by Athanasius of the atoning work of Christ has two characteristic features: First, it is based upon the doctrine of the Trinity;—God only can reconcile man with God. Secondly, it rests on the idea of a debt which is paid, not to the devil, but to God. This debt is also due to death, who has a sort of right over Christ, like the right of the devil in the former scheme. If it be asked in what this view differs from that of Anselm, the answer seems to be, chiefly in the circumstance that it is stated with less distinctness: it is *a* form, not *the* form, which Athanasius gave to the doctrine. In the conception of the death of Christ as a debt, he is followed, however, by several of the Greek Fathers. Rhetoric delighted to represent the debt as more than paid; the payment was 'even as the ocean to a drop in comparison with the sins of men' (Chrys. on *Rom. Hom.* x. 17). It is pleasing further to remark that a kind of latitudinarianism was allowed by the Fathers themselves. Gregory of Nazianzen

(*Orat.* xxxiii. p. 536) numbers speculations about the sufferings of Christ among those things on which it is useful to have correct ideas, but not dangerous to be mistaken. On the whole the doctrine of the Fathers of the first four centuries may be said to oscillate between two points of view, which are brought out with different degrees of clearness. (1) The atonement was effected by the death of Christ; which was a satisfaction to the devil, and an offering to God: (2) The atonement was effected by the union in Christ of the Divine and human nature in the 'logos', or word of God. That neither view is embodied in any creed is a proof that the doctrine of atonement was not, in the first centuries, what modern writers often make it, the corner-stone of the Christian faith.

An interval of more than 700 years separates Athanasius from Anselm. One eminent name occurs during this interval, that of Scotus Erigena, whose conception of the atonement is the co-eternal unity of all things with God; the participation in this unity had been lost by man, not in time, but in eternity, and was restored in the person of Christ likewise from eternity. The views of Erigena present some remarkable coincidences with very recent speculations; in the middle ages he stands alone, at the end, not at the beginning, of a great period;—he is the last of the Platonists, not the first of the schoolmen. He had consequently little influence on the centuries which followed. Those centuries gradually assumed a peculiar character; and received in after times another name, scholastic, as opposed to patristic. The intellect was beginning to display a new power; men were asking, not exactly for a reason of the faith that was in them, but for a clearer conception and definition of it. The

Aristotelian philosophy furnished distinctions which were applied with a more than Aristotelian precision to statements of doctrine. Logic took the place of rhetoric; the school of the Church; figures of speech became abstract ideas. Theology was exhibited under a new aspect, as a distinct object or reality of thought. Questions on which Scripture was silent, on which councils and Popes would themselves pronounce no decision, were raised and answered within a narrow sphere by the activity of the human mind itself. The words 'sacrifice', 'satisfaction', 'ransom', could no longer be used indefinitely; it was necessary to determine further to whom and for what the satisfaction was made, and to solve the new difficulties which thereupon arose in the effort to gain clearer and more connected ideas.

2. It was a true feeling of Anselm that the old doctrine of satisfaction contained an unchristian element in attributing to the devil a right independent of God. That man should be delivered over to Satan may be just; it is a misrepresentation to say that Satan had any right over man. Therefore no right of the devil is satisfied by the death of Christ. He who had the real right is God, who has been robbed of His honour; to whom is, indeed, owing on the part of man an infinite debt. For sin is in its nature infinite; the world has no compensation for that which a good man would not do in exchange for the world (*Cur Deus Homo*, i. 21). God only can satisfy himself. The human nature of Christ enables Him to incur, the infinity of his Divine nature to pay, this debt (ii. 6, 7). This payment of the debt, however, is not the salvation of mankind, but only the condition of salvation; a link is still wanting in the work of grace. The two parties are equalized; the honour of which God was robbed



is returned, but man has no claim for any further favour. This further favour, however, is indirectly a result of the death of Christ. For the payment of the debt by the Son partakes of the nature of a gift which must needs have a recompense (ii. 20) from the Father, which recompense cannot be conferred on himself, and is therefore made at His request to man. The doctrine ultimately rests on two reasons or grounds; the first a noble one, that it must be far from God to suffer any rational creature to perish entirely (*Cur Deus Homo*, i. 4, ii. 4); the second a trifling one, viz. that God, having created the angels in a perfect number, it was necessary that man, saved through Christ, should fill up that original number, which was impaired by their fall. And as Anselm, in the spirit of St. Paul, though not quite consistently with his own argument, declares, the mercy of God was shown in the number of the saved exceeding the number of the lost (*Cur Deus Homo*, i. 16, 18).

This theory, which is contained in the remarkable treatise *Cur Deus Homo*, is consecutively reasoned throughout; yet the least reasons seem often sufficient to satisfy the author. While it escapes one difficulty it involves several others; though conceived in a nobler and more Christian spirit than any previous view of the work of Christ, it involves more distinctly the hideous consequence of punishing the innocent for the guilty. It is based upon analogies, symmetries, numerical fitnesses; yet under these logical fancies is contained a true and pure feeling of the relation of man to God. The notion of satisfaction or payment of a debt, on the other hand, is absolutely groundless, and seems only to result from a certain logical position which the human mind has arbitrarily assumed. The scheme implies further two apparently contradictory notions; one, a necessity in

the nature of things for this and no other means of redemption; the other, the free will of God in choosing the salvation of man. Anselm endeavours to escape from this difficulty by substituting the conception of a moral for that of a metaphysical necessity (ii. 5). God chose the necessity and Christ chose the fulfilment of His Father's commands. But the necessity by which the death of Christ is justified is thus reduced to a figure of speech. Lastly, the subjective side of the doctrine, which afterwards became the great question of the Reformation, the question, that is, in what way the death of Christ is to be apprehended by the believer, is hardly if at all touched upon by Anselm.

No progress was made during the four centuries which intervened between Anselm and the Reformation, towards the attainment of clearer ideas respecting the relations of God and man. The view of Anselm did not, however, at once or universally prevail; it has probably exercised a greater influence since the Reformation (being the basis of what may be termed the evangelical doctrine of the atonement) than in earlier ages. The spirit of the older theology was too congenial to those ages quickly to pass away. Bernard and others continued to maintain the right of the devil: a view not wholly obsolete in our own day. The two great masters of the schools agreed in denying the necessity on which the theory of Anselm was founded. They differed from Anselm also respecting the conception of an infinite satisfaction; Thomas Aquinas distinguishing the 'infinite' Divine merit, and 'abundant' human satisfaction; while Duns Scotus rejected the notion of infinity altogether, declaring that the scheme of redemption might have been equally accomplished by the death of an angel or a righteous man. Abelard, at an

earlier period, attached special importance to the moral aspect of the work of Christ; he denied the right of the devil, and declared the love of Christ to be the redeeming principle, because it calls forth the love of man. Peter Lombard also, who retained, like Bernard, the old view of the right of the devil, agreed with Abelard in giving a moral character to the work of redemption.

3. The doctrines of the Reformed as well as of the Catholic Church were expressed in the language of the scholastic theology. But the logic which the Catholic party had employed in defining and distinguishing the body of truth already received, the teachers of the Reformation used to express the subjective feelings of the human soul. Theology made a transition, such as we may observe at one or two epochs in the history of philosophy, from the object to the subject. Hence, the doctrine of atonement or satisfaction became subordinate to the doctrine of justification. The reformers begin, not with ideas, but with the consciousness of sin; with immediate human interests, not with speculative difficulties; not with mere abstractions, but with a great struggle; 'without were fightings, within were fears'. As of Socrates and philosophy, so it may be also said truly of Luther in a certain sense, that he brought down the work of redemption 'from heaven to earth'. The great question with him was, 'how we might be freed from the punishment and guilt of sin', and the answer was, through the appropriation of the merits of Christ. All that man was or might have been, Christ became, and was; all that Christ did or was, attached or was imputed to man: as God, he paid the infinite penalty; as man, he fulfilled the law. The first made redemption possible, the second perfected it. The first was termed



in the language of that age, the 'obedientia passiva', the second, the 'obedientia activa'.

In this scheme the doctrine of satisfaction is far from being prominent or necessary; it is a remnant of an older theology which was retained by the Reformers and prevented their giving a purely moral character to the work of Christ. There were differences among them respecting the two kinds of obedience; some regarding the 'obedientia passiva' as the cause or condition of the 'obedientia activa', while others laid no stress on the distinction. But all the great chiefs of the Reformation agreed in the fiction of imputed righteousness. Little had been said in earlier times of a doctrine of imputation. But now the Bible was reopened and read over again in one light only, 'justification by faith and not by works'. The human mind seemed to seize with a kind of avidity on any distinction which took it out of itself, and at the same time freed it from the burden of ecclesiastical tyranny. Figures of speech in which Christ was said to die for man or for the sins of man were understood in as crude and literal a sense as the Catholic Church had attempted to gain from the words of the institution of the Eucharist. Imputation and substitution among Protestant divines began to be formulas as strictly imposed as transubstantiation with their opponents. To Luther, Christ was not only the Holy One who died for the sins of men, but the sinner himself on whom the vials of Divine wrath were poured out. And seeing in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans the power which the law exercised in that age of the world over Jewish or half-Jewish Christians, he transferred the state which the Apostle there describes to his own age, and imagined that the burden under which he himself had groaned was

the same law of which St. Paul spoke, which Christ first fulfilled in His own person and then abolished for ever.

It was not unnatural that in the middle ages, when morality had no free or independent development, the doctrine of the atonement should have been drawn out on the analogy of law. Nor is there any reason why we should feel surprised that, with the revival of the study of Scripture at the Reformation, the Mosaic law should have exercised a great influence over the ideas of Protestants. More singular, yet an analogous phenomenon, is the attempt of Grotius to conceive the work of Christ by the help of the principles of political justice. All men are under the influence of their own education or profession, and they are apt to conceive truths which are really of a different or higher kind under some form derived from it; they require such a degree or kind of evidence as their minds are accustomed to, and political or legal principles have often been held a sufficient foundation for moral truth.

The theory of the celebrated jurist proceeds from the conception of God as governor of the universe. As such, He may forgive sins just as any other ruler may remit the punishment of offences against positive law. But although the ruler possesses the power to remit sins, and there is nothing in the nature of justice which would prevent his doing so, yet he has also a duty, which is to uphold his own authority and that of the laws. To do so, he must enforce punishment for the breach of them. This punishment, however, may attach not to the offender, but to the offence. Such a distinction is not unknown to the law itself. We may apply this to the work of Christ. There was no difficulty in the nature of things which prevented God from freely pardoning the sins of

men ; the power of doing so was vested in His hands as governor of the world. But it was inexpedient that He should exercise this power without first making an example. This was effected by the death of Christ. It pleased God to act according to the pedantic rules of earthly jurisprudence. It is useless to criticize such a theory further ; almost all theologians have agreed in reprobating it ; it adopts the analogy of law, and violates its first principles by considering a moral or legal act without reference to the agent. The reason which Grotius assigns for the death of Christ is altogether trivial.

4. Later theories on the doctrine of the atonement may be divided into two classes, English and German, logical and metaphysical ; those which proceed chiefly by logical inference, and those which connect the conception of the atonement with speculative philosophy.

Earlier English writers were chiefly employed in defining the work of Christ ; later ones have been most occupied with the attempt to soften or moderate the more repulsive features of the older statements ; the former have a dogmatical, the latter an apologetical character. The nature of the sufferings of Christ, whether they were penal or only quasi-penal, whether they were physical or mental, greater in degree than human sufferings, or different in kind ; in what more precisely the compensation offered by Christ truly consisted ; the nature of the obedience of Christ, whether to God or the law, and the connexion of the whole question with that of the Divine decrees :—these were among the principal subjects discussed by the great Presbyterian divines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Continuing in the same line of thought as their predecessors, they seem to have been unconscious of the



difficulties to which the eyes of a later generation have opened.

But at last the question has arisen within, as well as without, the Church of England: 'How the ideas of expiation, or satisfaction, or sacrifice, or imputation, are reconcilable with the moral and spiritual nature either of God or man?' Some there are who answer from analogy, and cite instances of vicarious suffering which appear in the disorder of the world around us. But analogy is a broken reed; of use, indeed, in pointing out the way where its intimations can be verified, but useless when applied to the unseen world in which the eye of observation no longer follows. Others affirm revelation or inspiration to be above criticism, and, in disregard alike of Church history and of Scripture, assume their own view of the doctrine of the atonement to be a revealed or inspired truth. They do not see that they are cutting off the branch of the tree on which they are themselves sitting. For, if the doctrine of the atonement cannot be criticized, neither can it be determined what is the doctrine of the atonement; nor, on the same principles, can any true religion be distinguished from any false one, or any truth of religion from any error. It is suicidal in theology to refuse the appeal to a moral criterion. Others add a distinction of things above reason and things contrary to reason; a favourite theological weapon, which has, however, no edge or force, so long as it remains a generality. Others, in like manner, support their view of the doctrine of the atonement by a theory of accommodation, which also loses itself in ambiguity. For it is not determined whether, by accommodation to the human faculties, is meant the natural subjectiveness of knowledge, or some other limitation which applies to theology only. Others

regard the death of Christ, not as an atonement or satisfaction to God, but as a manifestation of His righteousness, a theory which agrees with that of Grotius in its general character, when the latter is stripped of its technicalities. This theory is the shadow or surface of that of satisfaction ; the human analogy equally fails ; the punishment of the innocent for the guilty is not more unjust than the punishment of the innocent as an example to the guilty. Lastly, there are some who would read the doctrine of the atonement ‘in the light of Divine love only’ ; the object of the sufferings and death of Christ being to draw men’s hearts to God by the vision of redeeming love (compare Abelard), and the sufferings themselves being the natural result of the passage of the Saviour through a world of sin and shame. Of these explanations the last seems to do the least violence to our moral feelings. Yet it would surely be better to renounce any attempt at inquiry into the objective relations of God and man, than to rest the greatest fact in the history of mankind on so slender a ground as the necessity for arousing the love of God in the human heart, in this and no other way.

German theology during the last hundred years has proceeded by a different path ; it has delighted to recognize the doctrine of the atonement as the centre of religion, and also of philosophy. This tendency is first observable in the writings of Kant, and may be traced through the schools of his successors, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, as well as in the works of the two philosophical theologians Daub and Schleiermacher. These great thinkers all use the language of orthodoxy ; it cannot be said, however, that the views of any of them agree with the teaching of the patristic or medieval Church, or of the Reformers, or of the simpler expressions of

Scripture. Yet they often bring into new meaning and prominence texts on this subject which have been pushed aside by the regular current of theology. The difficulties which they all alike experience are two : first, how to give a moral meaning to the idea of atonement ; secondly, how to connect the idea with the historical fact.

According to Kant, the atonement consists in the sacrifice of the individual ; a sacrifice in which the sin of the old man is ever being compensated by the sorrows and virtues of the new. This atonement, or reconciliation of man with God, consists in an endless progress towards a reconciliation which is never absolutely completed in this life, and yet, by the continual increase of good and diminution of evil, is a sufficient groundwork of hope and peace. Perfect reconciliation would consist in the perfect obedience of a free agent to the law of duty or righteousness. For this Kant substitutes the ideal of the Son of God. The participation in this ideal of humanity is an aspect of the reconciliation. In a certain sense, in the sight of God, that is, and in the wish and resolution of the individual, the change from the old to the new is not gradual, but sudden : the end is imputed or anticipated in the beginning. So Kant 'rationalizes' the ordinary Lutheran doctrine of justification ; unconscious, as in other parts of his philosophy, of the influence which existing systems are exercising over him. Man goes out of himself to grasp at a reflection which is still—himself. The mystical is banished only to return again in an arbitrary and imaginative form,—a phenomenon which we may often observe in speculation as well as in the characters of individuals.

Schleiermacher's view of the doctrine of the atonement is almost equally different from that of Kant



who preceded him, and of Hegel and others who were his contemporaries or successors: it is hardly more like the popular theories. Reconciliation with God he conceives as a participation in the Divine nature. Of this participation the Church, through the Spirit, is the medium; the individual is redeemed and consoled by communion with his fellow-men. If in the terminology of philosophy we ask which is the objective, which the subjective part of the work of redemption, the answer of Schleiermacher seems to be that the subjective redemption of the individual is the consciousness of union with God; and the objective part, which corresponds to this consciousness, is the existence of the Church, which derives its life from the Spirit of God, and is also the depository of the truth of Christ. The same criticism, however, applies to this as to the preceding conception of the atonement, viz. that it has no real historical basis. The objective truth is nothing more than the subjective feeling or opinion which prevails in a particular Church. Schleiermacher deduces the historical from the ideal, and regards the ideal as existing only in the communion of Christians. But the truth of a fact is not proved by the truth of an idea. And the personal relation of the believer to Christ, instead of being immediate, is limited (as in the Catholic system) by the existence of the Church.

Later philosophers have conceived of the reconciliation of man with God as a reconciliation of God with himself. The infinite must evolve the finite from itself; yet the true infinite consists in the return of the finite to the infinite. By slow degrees, and in many stages of morality, of religion, and of knowledge, does the individual, according to Fichte, lay aside isolation and selfishness, gaining in strength

and freedom by the negation of freedom, until he rises into the region of the divine and absolute. This is reconciliation with God; a half Christian, half Platonic notion, which it is not easy to identify either with the subjective feeling of the individual, or with the historical fact. Daub has also translated the language of Scripture and of the Church into metaphysical speculation. According to this thinker, atonement is the realization of the unity of man with God, which is also the unity of God with himself. 'Deus Deum cum mundo conjunctum Deo manifestat.' Perhaps this is as near an approach as philosophy can make to a true expression of the words, 'That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us'. Yet the metaphysical truth is a distant and indistinct representation of the mind of Christ which is expressed in these words. Its defect is exhibited in the image under which Fichte described it—the absolute unity of light; in other words, God, like the being of the Eleatics, is a pure abstraction, and returning into himself is an abstraction still.

It is characteristic of Schelling's system that he conceives the nature of God, not as abstraction, but as energy or action. The finite and manifold are not annihilated in the infinite; they are the revelation of the infinite. Man is the son of God; of this truth Christ is the highest expression and the eternal idea. But in the world this revelation or incarnation of God is ever going on; the light is struggling with darkness, the spirit with nature, the universal with the particular. That victory which was achieved in the person of Christ is not yet final in individuals or in history. Each person, each age, carries on the same conflict between good and evil, the triumphant

end of which is anticipated in the life and death of Christ.

Hegel, beginning with the doctrine of a Trinity, regards the atonement as the eternal reconciliation of the finite and the infinite in the bosom of God himself. The Son goes forth from the Father, as the world or finite being, to exist in a difference which is done away and lost in the absoluteness of God. Here the question arises, how individuals become partakers of this reconciliation? The answer is, by the finite receiving the revelation of God. The consciousness of God in man is developed, first, in the worship of nature; secondly, in the manifestation of Christ; thirdly, in the faith of the Church that God and man are one, of which faith the Holy Spirit is the source. The death of Christ is the separation of this truth from the elements of nature and sense. Hegelian divines have given this doctrine a more Pantheistic or more Christian aspect; they have, in some instances, studiously adopted orthodox language; they have laid more or less stress on the historical facts. But they have done little as yet to make it intelligible to the world at large; they have acquired for it no fixed place in history, and no hold upon life.

Englishmen, especially, feel a national dislike at the 'things which accompany salvation' being perplexed with philosophical theories. They find it easier to caricature than to understand Hegel; they prefer the most unintelligible expressions with which they are familiar to great thoughts which are strange to them. No man of sense really supposes that Hegel or Schelling is so absurd as they may be made to look in an uncouth English translation, or as they unavoidably appear to many in a brief summary of their tenets. Yet it may be doubted whether



this philosophy can ever have much connexion with the Christian life. It seems to reflect at too great a distance what ought to be very near us. It is metaphysical, not practical; it creates an atmosphere in which it is difficult to breathe; it is useful as supplying a light or law by which to arrange the world, rather than as a principle of action or warmth. Man is a microcosm, and we do not feel quite certain whether the whole system is not the mind itself turned inside out, and magnified in enormous proportions. Whatever interest it may arouse in speculative natures (and it is certainly of great value to a few), it will hardly find a home or welcome in England.

### § 3.

The silence of our Lord in the Gospels respecting any doctrine of atonement and sacrifice, the variety of expressions which occur in other parts of the New Testament, the fluctuation and uncertainty both of the Church and individuals on this subject in after ages, incline us to agree with Gregory Nazianzen, that the death of Christ is one of those points of faith 'about which it is not dangerous to be mistaken'. And the sense of the imperfection of language and the illusions to which we are subject from the influence of past ideas, the consciousness that doctrinal perplexities arise chiefly from our transgression of the limits of actual knowledge, will lead us to desire a very simple statement of the work of Christ; a statement, however, in accordance with our moral ideas, and one which will not shift and alter with the metaphysical schools of the age; one, moreover, which runs no risk of being overthrown by an increasing study of the Old Testament or of ecclesiastical history. Endless theories there have been (of which the preceding sketch contains only a small

portion), and many more there will be as time goes on, like mystery plays, or sacred dramas (to adapt Lord Bacon's image), which have passed before the Church and the world. To add another would increase the confusion: it is ridiculous to think of settling a disputed point of theology unless by some new method. That other method can only be a method of agreement; little progress has been made hitherto by the method of difference. It is not reasonable, but extremely unreasonable, that the most sacred of all books should be the only one respecting the interpretation of which there is no certainty; that religion alone should be able to perpetuate the enmities of past ages; that the influence of words and names, which secular knowledge has long shaken off, should still intercept the natural love of Christians towards one another and their Lord. On our present subject there is no difficulty in finding a basis of reconciliation; the way opens when logical projections are removed, and we look at the truth in what may be rightly termed a more primitive and Apostolical manner. For all, or almost all, Christians would agree that in some sense or other we are reconciled to God through Christ; whether by the atonement and satisfaction which He made to God for us, or by His manifestation of the justice of God or love of God in the world, by the passive obedience of His death or the active obedience of His life, by the imputation of His righteousness to us or by our identity and communion with Him, or likeness to Him, or love of Him; in some one of these senses, which easily pass into each other, all would join in saying that 'He is the way, the truth, and the life'. And had the human mind the same power of holding fast points of agreement as of discerning differences, there would be an end of the controversy.



The statements of Scripture respecting the work of Christ are very simple, and may be used without involving us in the determination of these differences. We can live and die in the language of St. Paul and St. John; there is nothing there repugnant to our moral sense. We have a yet higher authority in the words of Christ himself. Only in repeating and elucidating these statements, we must remember that Scripture phraseology is of two kinds, simple and figurative, and that the first is the interpretation of the second. We must not bring the New Testament into bondage to the Old, but ennoble and transfigure the Old by the New.

First; the death of Christ may be described as a sacrifice. But what sacrifice? Not 'the blood of bulls and of goats, nor the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean', but the living sacrifice 'to do thy will, O God'. It is a sacrifice which is the negation of sacrifice; 'Christ the end of the law to them that believe'. Peradventure, in a heathen country, to put an end to the rite of sacrifice 'some one would even dare to die'; that expresses the relation in which the offering on Mount Calvary stands to the Levitical offerings. It is the death of what is outward and local, the life of what is inward and spiritual: 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, shall draw all men after me'; and 'Neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father'. It is the offering up of the old world on the cross; the law with its handwriting of ordinances, the former man with his affections and lusts, the body of sin with its remembrances of past sin. It is the New Testament revealed in the blood of Christ, the Gospel of freedom, which draws men together in the communion of one spirit, as in St. Paul's time without respect of persons and nations, so in our own day without regard



to the divisions of Christendom. In the place of Churches, priesthoods, ceremonials, systems, it puts a moral and spiritual principle which works with them, not necessarily in opposition to them, but beside or within them, to renew life in the individual soul.

Again, the death of Christ may be described as a ransom. It is not that God needs some payment which He must receive before He will set the captives free. The ransom is not a human ransom, any more than the sacrifice is a Levitical sacrifice. Rightly to comprehend the nature of this Divine ransom, we must begin with that question of the Apostle: 'Know ye not that whose servants ye yield yourselves to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' There are those who will reply: 'We were never in bondage at any time'. To whom Christ answers: 'Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin'; and, 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed'. Ransom is 'deliverance to the captive'. There are mixed modes here also, as in the use of the term sacrifice,—the word has a temporary allusive reference to a Mosaical figure of speech. That secondary allusive reference we are constrained to drop, because it is unessential; and also because it immediately involves further questions—a ransom to whom? for what?—about which Scripture is silent, to which reason refuses to answer.

Thirdly, the death of Christ is spoken of as a death for us, or for our sins. The ambiguous use of the preposition 'for', combined with the figure of sacrifice, has tended to introduce the idea of substitution; when the real meaning is not 'in our stead', but only 'in behalf of', or 'because of us'. It is a great assumption, or an unfair deduction, from such expressions, to say that Christ takes our place, or that

the Father in looking at the sinner sees only Christ. Christ died for us in no other sense than He lived or rose again for us. Scripture affords no hint of His taking our place in His death in any other way than He did also in His life. He himself speaks of His 'decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem', quite simply: 'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'. The words of Caiaphas, 'It is expedient that one man should die for this nation', and the comment of the Evangelist, 'and not for that nation only, but that he should gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad', afford a measure of the meaning of such expressions. Here, too, there are mixed modes which seem to be inextricably blended in the language of Scripture, and which theology has not always distinguished. For the thing signified is, partly, that Christ died for our sakes, partly that he died by the hands of sinners, partly that He died with a perfect and Divine sympathy for human evil and suffering. But this ambiguity (which we may silently correct or explain) need not prevent our joining in words which, more perhaps than any others, have been consecrated by religious use to express the love and affection of Christians towards their Lord.

Now suppose some one who is aware of the plastic and accommodating nature of language to observe, that in what has been written of late years on the doctrine of the atonement he has noticed an effort made to win for words new senses, and that some of the preceding remarks are liable to this charge; he may be answered, first, that those new senses are really a recovery of old ones (for the writers of the New Testament, though they use the language of the time, everywhere give it a moral meaning); and,

secondly, that in addition to the modes of conception already mentioned, the Scripture has others which are not open to his objection. And those who, admitting the innocence and Scriptural character of the expressions already referred to, may yet fear their abuse, and therefore desire to have them excluded from articles of faith (just as many Protestants, though aware that the religious use of images is not idolatry, may not wish to see them in churches)—such persons may find a sufficient expression of the work of Christ in other modes of speech which the Apostle also uses. (1) Instead of the language of sacrifice, or ransom, or substitution, they may prefer that of communion or identity. (2) Or they may interpret the death of Christ by His life, and connect the bleeding form on Mount Calvary with the image of Him who went about doing good. Or (3) they may look inward at their own souls, and read there, inseparable from the sense of their own unworthiness, the assurance that God will not desert the work of His hands, of which assurance the death of Christ is the outward witness to them. There are other ways, also, of conceiving the redemption of man which avoid controversy, any of which is a sufficient stay of the Christian life. For the kingdom of God is not this or that statement, or definition of opinion, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. And the cross of Christ is to be taken up and borne; not to be turned into words, or made a theme of philosophical speculation.

1. Everywhere St. Paul speaks of the Christian as one with Christ. He is united with Him, not in His death only, but in all stages of His existence; living with Him, suffering with Him, crucified with Him, buried with Him, rising again with Him, renewed in His image, glorified together with Him;



these are the expressions by which this union is denoted. There is something meant by this language which goes beyond the experience of ordinary Christians, something, perhaps, more mystical than in these latter days of the world most persons seem to be capable of feeling, yet the main thing signified is the same for all ages, the knowledge and love of Christ, by which men pass out of themselves to make their will His and His theirs, the consciousness of Him in their thoughts and actions, communion with Him, and trust in Him. Of every act of kindness or good which they do to others His life is the type; of every act of devotion or self-denial His death is the type; of every act of faith His resurrection is the type. And often they walk with Him on earth, not in a figure only, and find Him near them, not in a figure only, in the valley of death. They experience from Him the same kind of support as from the sympathy and communion of an earthly friend. That friend is also a Divine power. In proportion as they become like Him, they are reconciled to God through Him; they pass with Him into the relationship of sons of God. There is enough here for faith to think of, without sullyng the mirror of God's justice, or overclouding His truth. We need not suppose that God ever sees us other than we really are, or attributes to us what we never did. Doctrinal statements, in which the nature of the work of Christ is most exactly defined, cannot really afford the same support as the simple conviction of His love.

Again (2), the import of the death of Christ may be interpreted by His life. No theological speculation can throw an equal light on it. From the other side we cannot see it, but only from this. Now the life of Christ is the life of One who knew

no sin, on whom the shadow of evil never passed; who went about doing good; who had not where to lay His head; whose condition was in all respects the reverse of earthly and human greatness; who also had a sort of infinite sympathy or communion with all men everywhere; whom, nevertheless, His own nation betrayed to a shameful death. It is the life of One who came to bear witness of the truth, who knew what was in man, and never spared to rebuke him, yet condemned him not; himself without sin, yet One to whom all men would soonest have gone to confess and receive forgiveness of sin. It is the life of One who was in constant communion with God as well as man; who was the inhabitant of another world while outwardly in this. It is the life of One in whom we see balanced and united the separate gifts and graces of which we catch glimpses only in the lives of His followers. It is a life which is mysterious to us, which we forbear to praise, in the earthly sense, because it is above praise, being the most perfect image and embodiment that we can conceive of Divine goodness.

And the death of Christ is the fulfilment and consummation of His life, the greatest moral act ever done in this world, the highest manifestation of perfect love, the centre in which the rays of love converge and meet, the extremest abnegation or annihilation of self. It is the death of One who seals with His blood the witness of the truth which He came into the world to teach, which therefore confirms our faith in Him as well as animates our love. It is the death of One, who says at the last hour, 'Of them that thou gavest me, I have not lost one,'—of One who, having come forth from God, and having finished the work which He came into the world to do, returns to God. It is a death in

which all the separate gifts of heroes and martyrs are united in a Divine excellence—of One who most perfectly foresaw all things that were coming upon Him—who felt all, and shrank not—of One who, in the hour of death, set the example to His followers of praying for his enemies. It is a death which, more even than His life, is singular and mysterious, in which nevertheless we are all partakers,—in which there was the thought and consciousness of mankind to the end of time, which has also the power of drawing to itself the thoughts of men to the end of time.

Lastly, there is a true Christian feeling in many other ways of regarding the salvation of man, of which the heart is its own witness, which yet admit, still less than the preceding, of logical rule and precision. He who is conscious of his own infirmity and sinfulness, is ready to confess that he needs reconciliation with God. He has no proud thoughts: he knows that he is saved ‘not of himself, it is the gift of God’; the better he is, the more he feels, in the language of Scripture, ‘that he is an unprofitable servant’. Sometimes he imagines the Father ‘coming out to meet him, when he is yet a long way off’, as in the parable of the Prodigal Son; at other times the burden of sin lies heavy on him; he seems to need more support—he can approach God only through Christ. All men are not the same; one has more of the strength of reason in his religion; another more of the tenderness of feeling. With some, faith partakes of the nature of a pure and spiritual morality; there are others who have gone through the struggle of St. Paul or Luther, and attain rest only in casting all on Christ. One will live after the pattern of the Sermon on the Mount, or the Epistle of St. James. Another finds a deep consolation and meaning in a closer union with



Christ ; he will 'put on Christ', he will hide himself in Christ ; he will experience in his own person the truth of those words of the Apostle, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'. But if he have the spirit of moderation that there was in St. Paul, he will not stereotype these true, though often passing feelings, in any formula of substitution or satisfaction ; still less will he draw out formulas of this sort into remote consequences. Such logical idealism is of another age ; it is neither faith nor philosophy in this. Least of all will he judge others by the circumstance of their admitting or refusing to admit the expression of his individual feelings as an eternal truth. He shrinks from asserting his own righteousness ; he is equally unwilling to affirm that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. He is looking for forgiveness of sins, not because Christ has satisfied the wrath of God, but because God can show mercy without satisfaction : he may have no right to acquittal, he dare not say, God has no right to acquit. Yet again, he is very far from imagining that the most merciful God will indiscriminately forgive ; or that the weakness of human emotions, groaning out at the last hour a few accustomed phrases, is a sufficient ground of confidence and hope. He knows that the only external evidence of forgiveness is the fact, that he has ceased to do evil ; no other is possible. Having Christ near as a friend and a brother, and making the Christian life his great aim, he is no longer under the dominion of a conventional theology. He will not be distracted by its phrases from communion with his fellow men. He can never fall into that confusion of head and heart, which elevates matters of opinion into practical principles. Difficulties and doubts diminish with him, as he himself grows more

like Christ, not because he forcibly suppresses them, but because they become unimportant in comparison with purity, and holiness, and love. Enough of truth for him seems to radiate from the person of the Saviour. He thinks more and more of the human nature of Christ as the expression of the Divine. He has found the way of life,—that way is not an easy way,—but neither is it beset by the imaginary perplexities with which a false use of the intellect in religion has often surrounded it.

It seems to be an opinion which is gaining ground among thoughtful and religious men, that in theology, the less we define the better. Definite statements respecting the relation of Christ either to God or man are only figures of speech; they do not really pierce the clouds which 'round our little life'. When we multiply words we do not multiply ideas; we are still within the circle of our own minds. No greater calamity has ever befallen the Christian Church than the determination of some uncertain things which are beyond the sphere of human knowledge. A true instinct prevents our entangling the faith of Christ with the philosophy of the day; the philosophy of past ages is a still more imperfect exponent of it. Neither is it of any avail to assume revelation or inspiration as a sort of shield, or Catholicon, under which the weak points of theology may receive protection. For what is revealed or what inspired cannot be answered *a priori*; the meaning of the word Revelation must be determined by the fact, not the fact by the word.

If our Saviour were to come again to earth, which of all the theories of atonement and sacrifice would

he sanction with His authority? Perhaps none of them, yet perhaps all may be consistent with a true service of Him. The question has no answer. But it suggests the thought that we shrink from bringing controversy into his presence. The same kind of lesson may be gathered from the consideration of theological differences in the face of death. Who, as he draws near to Christ, will not feel himself drawn towards his theological opponents? At the end of life, when a man looks back calmly, he is most likely to find that he exaggerated in some things; that he mistook party spirit for a love of truth. Perhaps, he had not sufficient consideration for others, or stated the truth itself in a manner which was calculated to give offence. In the heat of the struggle, let us at least pause to imagine polemical disputes as they will appear a year, two years, three years hence; it may be, dead and gone—certainly more truly seen than in the hour of controversy. For the truths about which we are disputing cannot partake of the passing stir; they do not change even with the greater revolutions of human things. They are in eternity; and the image of them on earth is not the movement on the surface of the waters, but the depths of the silent sea. Lastly, as a measure of the value of such disputes, which above all other interests seem to have for a time the power of absorbing men's minds and rousing their passions, we may carry our thoughts onward to the invisible world, and there behold, as in a glass, the great theological teachers of past ages, who have anathematized each other in their lives, resting together in the communion of the same Lord.



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